RAOUL MORTLEY

Plotinus, Self and the World

CAMBRIDGE

PLOTINUS, SELF AND THE WORLD

Plotinus, Self and the World addresses the question of the individual subject in its relationship with the world, the 'All'. It traces the self through its experience of memory and forgetfulness, looks at whether the idea of the subconscious exists in Plotinus, and notes the probable impact of Plotinus' thought on the development of the autobiography, in the form of Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine historicises the Plotinian individual self. The book reinterprets the idea of *to oikeion* in Plotinus and places great emphasis on the importance of the idea of 'having', and the ability to possess is itself linked to being: thus we are close to the idea of personal authenticity. Lastly, the book examines Plotinus' view of images and art, and notes his respect for the beauty of the human face. His positive view of the physical world is stressed.

RAOUL MORTLEY is Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107040243

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First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Mortley, Raoul.
Plotinus, self and the world / Raoul Mortley.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-04024-3 (hardback)
1. Plotinus. I. Title.
B693.Z7M675 2013
186′.4 – dc23 2013023079

ISBN 978-1-107-04024-3 Hardback

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Preface

This book owes its development to a number of lectures and seminars, and the attendant discussion, given over the years at the Collège de France, the Sorbonne, the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, the Institut de Philosophie, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, and King's College London. I would like to express my grateful thanks for these opportunities to Michel Tardieu, Monique Dixsaut, Philippe Hoffmann, Anca Vasiliu and Richard Sorabji (and David Papineau), as well as to my old friend and interlocutor Annick Charles-Saget. It also owes a great deal to the work and friendship of the late Jean Pépin, to whom I would like to pay tribute as having had an especially important place in my life. My wife, Miranda, has been particularly supportive of me and my work on this project: to her, grateful thanks.

My university, Bond University, has been generous in supporting this work and I would like to acknowledge this.

Lastly, my grateful thanks go to my patient and highly competent executive assistant, Anouschka Bridgman, for all her help with setting up the document, and to my research assistant Trishita Mathew.

Introduction

We will begin by explaining the approach and outlook which has led to the writing of this book, and we seek here to raise some of the main themes of the work and to sum up what might be its contribution.

For Plotinus the individual self is placed in a whole, which is the All: this is the world of the self. It has numerous encounters, or touch points within this world – which range from loving to having, for example. This intersecting with its environment is as true for the physical body as it is for the highest reaches of the spirit, at which point the limits of the self are truly explored. The relationship between the self and its ambient reality is many-sided, and it is impossible to draw a single line around the periphery of the self.

'The Good is gentle and kind and gracious, and is present to anyone as he wishes.'[1] There is no rigidity about boundaries here, nothing schematic about the limits of the self. The Good may come and go, but this is partly dependent on the wishes of the individual.

In what follows we explore a number of encounter-points, without any claim that we have dealt with the matter exhaustively. The self has variable boundaries and there are many such points of encounter, and we endeavour to explore some of them. There is no doubt much more to be said along these lines, about the self and its limitless encounters.

The method used is exploratory and often asks questions drawn from a background of European philosophy, itself closer in the tradition to the thought of Plotinus himself. Much of European philosophy is more traditional, meaning that it is aligned with Greek and Western mediaeval philosophy, than it appears to be: its

[1] *Enn.* V.5(32)12, 33–35.

traditionalism is often disguised in apparently innovative language, this being especially the case with Heidegger. So we are often prompted by some of those themes and find them a useful hermeneutic for opening up Plotinus – in a way which is intended to be responsive to his insights, rather than instructing him as to how he should have thought about things, or how he would have thought about things if he had had the advantage of a modern philosophical education. The objective of this book is to help understand what Plotinus might have meant, what might have prompted his questions or statements, and what deep questions he may have shared with us, and is in no way intended to help Plotinus organise or improve his thoughts. The approach is intended to be respectful of the text. In this the writer has been influenced particularly by the presentations (particularly the oral presentations) of A.H. Armstrong, Jean Trouillard, Pierre Hadot and Jean Pépin, and has been instructed by a reading, and rereading, of Heidegger. The method chosen is exploratory and dubitative, and seeks to engage an enquiry, without necessarily finishing an enquiry. It strives for an attitude of humility towards the majestic reach and vision of the works of Plotinus. At times we wander with Plotinus.

We will select here several leading issues, which prompt some questions which may be addressed to or through the thought of Plotinus. We will open them up in a broad discursive way, ranging freely over the ideas which seem to be in the text as they present themselves, and later in the book these themes will be subjected to detailed scrutiny within the text of Plotinus.

There is probably more to be said on the subject of play, for example, than we have done, though we do attempt to deal with it. A ruminative book of this kind is to some extent a process of discovery, and inevitably one feels that one has only scratched the surface in concluding it. The human capacity for play, or fascination with play, is proving to be of greater and greater interest at the present time: the new word 'gameification' is an indication of this trend, and provides an indication that the principles of play are more and more being annexed into industry to transform work, or ordinary chores including educational chores, into play. The player enjoys strategy, the impression of progress, and ultimately the feeling of winning and achieving a sense of personal autonomy. Why do we play?

Plotinus is clearly interested in it in his own time, though with a clearly more negative assessment of play as an activity, often comparing human *praxis* to play. That is, in a certain sense human activity is not 'real'; it is merely play. (We do also explore what is real or authentic (*oikeion*) for the human being: that is how we choose to interpret this term; see Chapter 6, 'Being and having'.) It is as if so much of human *praxis* is pointless, undertaken for a purpose which is ephemeral or even inexplicable, that it can only be relegated to the status of 'play'. Far from providing profound insights, or should we say commercialisable insights, into human nature as is presently thought, play is a meaningless rehearsal of moves in a variety of roles or contexts, all equally insignificant.

We have touched on this issue at numerous points, particularly in Chapter 3, where we attempt to link ignorance and play. The issue has been elegantly treated by Stephen R.L. Clark in *Plotinus: Body and Soul*,[2] in a discussion of the parts which have to be played by human beings, as on a stage. 'The only difference, we may imagine, between men and brutes is that men are allowed to recognize that they are playing.'[3] Clark continues to develop the theme by quoting Wordsworth on the subject of the stage of life and the various parts which one is called upon to play, and which may change over time. And of course we know the words of the melancholy Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts . . . '.

There are other examples of this image in Shakespeare and it appears to be a well-established part of the tradition by his time. With regard to Plotinus what we try to consider is the way he runs together the stage metaphor with that of play generally, this kind of association being permitted by the Greek words used. Man is both a player and a plaything, an actor and a participant, as well as a victim and a plaything. The actor in the play is also a toy, and is toyed with, though being in the apparently active and directive role on the stage – directive whilst being directed.

[2] In Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 275–91.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 282.

It appears that the human being is drawn into various ways of being by his physical constitution, by his cultural role, as a prince, beggar, or soldier, and plays out these roles without much choice or any particular authenticity. He is an actor but is tossed into roles willy-nilly by the world of the real. Within this instability of personal identity there must be something to hang onto, and this is the final stronghold of the actor/plaything. And this is how we seek to understand the principle of *to oikeion*. We argue here that 'having' what is proper to one constitutes that piece of reality which provides the solid basis for living. This theme of Plotinus, which has not been developed in the scholarship, provides a basis for positive thought against the possible negativity about life in the physical world, of which Plotinus might have been accused. The Good only has itself, but others have what is proper to them.

This leads us to reflect on the idea of authenticity in Plotinus, which we could attach to the twin themes of *to oikeion* ('one's own'), and that of having or possessing. These matters have generally not been taken together, but linking them is fruitful. It is clear that authenticity is a concept of major concern in the evolution of the West: Sartre, both in his novels and his philosophical works, does exalt the inner freedom which contrasts with the pressures on the self coming from external values and externally valued modes of behaviour. It should also be said that the Sartrean concept of authenticity could be reduced to an idea of ultra-freedom, a kind of un-French wildness.

At the same time the concept of autonomy, the capacity to be one's own person, has had immense importance since the philosophy of Kant, in whose moral philosophy it is central. Whilst this is fundamentally a concept of moral philosophy (rather than ontology), it is rooted in the idea that there is an inner core, which is not and cannot be made over to external distorting forces – and this is where we see some connection with Plotinus. Autonomy in the Western enlightenment is not so much a concept of freedom, but is about the personal authenticity in which such freedoms are rooted. It may at times be about self-governance, or even self-control, but even where this is the case there is a robust view of the competencies and the character of the underlying self.

Is the Western preoccupation with autonomy solely about freedom from interference? Is it about threats to autonomy, such as

dictatorship, slavery, or even simple paternalism? It would sometimes seem to be the case. It is certainly intimately associated with Western individualism, and the whole business of inviting others to get out of one's life. It has become a concept of moral philosophy, with concerns about self-worth and valuing oneself becoming an important part of the issue. Moral philosophy is the terrain, so that valuing and transgressing become the major issues.

But it is also partly about accepting responsibility, and calculating what is good and bad for one, about the basic undeniable constant of the real self. Freedom can exist within constraint, and is thought by some to be irreducible. In the end, Western autonomy has difficulties over the lack of real foundation for the 'moral imperative', as Kant had it.

So what Plotinus will say, as might be expected of a Platonist, is that the autonomy of the self is grounded in reality. Deontology is founded in ontology, as they say: there is no room for the relativism that threatens Kant or even Rawls. I was taught as a philosophy student that philosophy had made progress, and that we now knew that the Greeks' ontology was unfounded. That may be so, but the question I am asking is: Where does Plotinus lie in the history of Western thought on the subject of authenticity and autonomy? Does he make a contribution here which may be equal in importance to his other contributions, such as the idea of the personal individual self?

'Each thing exists more . . . when it belongs to itself.'[4] Here, Plotinus asserts that existence is tied to self-belonging, and that the impulse towards externality causes a departure from real being. It is not merely a question of externality, but the impulse towards size or multiplicity is also aimed in the wrong direction, as the basis of existence is found in the One. But the intention here is not to draw attention so much to the theme of the One and the multiple, as to the emphasis on self-belonging, or being 'of oneself' as the Greek says. There appears to be in Plotinus an idea of the legitimate ownership of a parcel of reality, and this ownership is the foundation of the idea of autonomy that we find in this writer. We do not, of course,

[4] *Enn.* VI.6(34)11, 12.

speak of ownership in any quasi-legal sense, but of a real holding on to something: based on the real, this possession cannot be the centre of any dispute or misunderstanding. My arm is my arm in a sense which is quite a deal more self-evidently true than the claim that my house is my house, or that my imagination is my own, and it is this indubitably fundamental and true reality which provides Plotinus with the basis of his approach to what we would now call autonomy or authenticity. He sees 'having' as an indispensable part of the human (and cosmic) condition, but it is that kind of real and undeniable having, not the having of acquisitiveness, which itself speaks of a fall into multiplicity, but the having which is irresistibly natural. The life you live is your 'own life' (see Chapter 6): there is an appropriate form of life, which is natural, given, as it should be. Having what is your own is a natural state, and in this state one should be what one truly is.

With the question of love (see Chapter 4) we seek to open up the gap between Plotinus and his master Plato: there are some quite striking differences. We will use the language of Heidegger who speaks of the closeness of reality to the subject: through a series of metaphors derived from the hand (*Zuhandenheit*, *Vorhandenheit*), and probably behind it all from Aristotle, Heidegger develops the theme that we are not estranged from our world of reality, but at home in it. The objective reality which surrounds us is not alien and does not present the challenge of the foreign. We do not have to get caught up here in the relative importance of *Dasein*, *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* in Heidegger, but simply note that, for Heidegger, that most traditional of philosophers with the most untraditional of language, the world of objective reality 'fits'. The world is to hand.

For Plotinus the soul reacts to beauty in a welcoming way, and recoils from ugliness. It is alienated from it. As a Greek he has no difficulty in seeing that there is a clear difference between the beautiful and the ugly. This is one part of love, the matching up of the soul and that part of the world which is beautiful. They are made for each other. They fit, so that for Plotinus there is no random spark which produces love, but rather a deep ontological harmony. His is a strangely static view of love based on what is, even though there is language about 'welcoming' and 'recoiling' and so on. The

investigation of erotic passion, clearly a starting-point for Plato, is completely absent. It follows that love is more about seeing that things are the case, namely, that the beautiful is beautiful and that it is there, than about some flash of unconnected inspiration.

So if the reality is there and the human spirit is attuned to that reality, or to that part of it which is beautiful, all that is needed is for the two to meet up. One might suspect that in so well structured a world this encounter would happen automatically, but there is still the need for an intermediary, which 'installs the vision', or gives the power of seeing. It is a puzzle to know why there is or remains such a gap in a world where beauty has only to be seen for it to be received and welcomed: the ontology of Plotinus seems to be so well structured that it is hard to imagine why such a dysfunction occurs. But the answer is probably two-fold: first, there is the obvious fact of human experience that love is a sporadic and occasional thing, and does not happen in a pre-planned way, or on a massive scale like the ocean lapping on the seashore which is meant for it. Secondly, Plato had made a place for *eros* and had also introduced the idea of the *metaxu*, or intermediary, needed precisely to bring the two parties together, so that any gap was overcome.

We will also discuss the absence of desire in Plotinus' *eros*, based as it is on a sort of satisfied contemplation of beauty: all the acquisitive, needful, and artful striving of Plato's lover goes by the board. Love and lust are clearly separated, and the latter is clearly relegated to a position of not much interest. We have discussed elsewhere[5] the role of desire in various philosophies or world views, over a range of views drawn from the history of the West, and noted the tendency to reduce the importance of desire where there is an accompanying tendency towards emphasising the wholeness, or homogeneity, of reality. There is only a need for such a disruptive and energising force where the objective world is thought to be alien or impenetrable.

In general, Plotinus associates desire with otherness and difference, and the two are relegated to an inferior status. The idea of difference (*heterotes, differentia*) has an interesting history running through from Plotinus to Thomas Aquinas, and to Heidegger then Derrida, and

[5] Raoul Mortley, *Désir et différence dans la tradition platonicienne* (Paris, Vrin, 1988), p. 33 ff.

there is a certain amount of constancy in the treatments of all these authors, even including the last two, when one sets aside the twentieth century penchant (in Europe) for neologising, and for a style which involves the appearance of innovation without innovation necessarily having taken place.

For Plotinus, otherness involves departure from the One and a falling away into an inferior state. He seeks to avoid equating otherness with spatial difference: difference is not a matter of place. He is clear that 'Things are first and second and third in rank, power and differences, not by their placement'.[6]

Plotinus wants things to be all together but also different from each other, without this having to be a matter of location: it is quite impossible that this variegated type of reality should be so by virtue of place (*topos*). He goes on to argue that such variegated reality is also simple or single, since the eye perceives the colour of a thing whilst at the same time another sense perceives its fragrance as being part of one and the same being. This discussion of otherness in the above passage sits alongside a discussion of presence (*parousia*), another theme of Plotinus which we do not treat in what follows, but which is a rich theme indeed, and rich in historical echoes again (one thinks of Heidegger's *Dasein*, or *da-sein*, which is quite clearly an exploration of this very idea of *parousia*, no doubt mediated through the tradition from Plotinus). Plotinus seeks to develop an idea of differentiation within presence, such that beings are present to each other whilst still enjoying some differentiation. 'Presence' involves not only proximity – that is the least of it – but a kind of unity within differentiation. In fact, it involves non-spatial differentiation; differentiation within space is exactly what it is not. There is a higher, positive form of differentiation.[7]

This makes it possible for Plotinus to claim difference in the One even though it would be expected that this should not be the case. It seems to be part of his thinking to have the presence

[6] *Enn.* VI.4(22)11, 9–11.

[7] See Mortley, *Désir et différence*, p. 34. It is clear, of course, that the idea of the *parousia* has an enormously strong place in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, referring to the coming, or presence, of God or Christ: it plays a strong role in Jesus' own teaching about himself (Mark 14:62), and is later developed into a more timeless idea by John. Paul develops it further, and of course, the Patristic tradition follows.

of the One available everywhere, and this cannot occur without difference.

'But that from which each individual thing comes is not an individual thing, but is different from all of them.'[8] There is foreshadowed here a positive view of difference which will see it later on in the tradition become a creative force, which links beings and makes them what they are. However, there is only a suggestion of this, and Plotinus is not one who emphasises a strong force of differentiation or otherness in the constitution of reality. The predominant view is of a universe bound together in a way which fits, and is harmonious.

Plotinus' view of love is based on the idea that it arises out of need, and that need itself arises out of privation. Matter is the source of this privation, which is reduction or removal of essence, because of its own privation, this arising from otherness or difference (the bad sense of difference in Plotinus). Desire thus springs from need, and desire is 'for' the beautiful. Plotinus follows the lead of Plato's *Symposium* but adds his own distinct reinterpretation. 'Love is love of what is beautiful', says Plato,[9] and of course this thought impregnates Plotinus' whole treatment of the issue. In what follows we consider Plotinus to have kept his distance from Plato's model, but in many respects there are similarities: some kind of non-rational awareness (*alogon synesin*) of beauty being 'their own' is what drives lovers, and what causes desire of beauty. Nature looks towards beauty when it creates. It recoils from ugliness.[10]

But we do notice that Plotinus does veer away from the emphasis on procreation that comes with Plato's narrative. More on this later, but let us note here that Plato does, as per Diotima in Socrates' narrative, notice that two lovers eventually want to procreate. That is, they turn their attention from each other, which is the first phase of passionate love, and they long to reproduce. At a certain age, we are told by Socrates, humankind becomes impatient to bring forth some progeny, to engender something, and when it does it wants 'to engender in beauty'.[11] Plato has thus made the desire for procreation part of his narrative of love, which is by and large an interpretation of human experience in the light of the transcendent reality in which

[8] *Enn.* V.3(49).11, 17–18.
[9] *Symposium* 204 D.
[10] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 17–23.
[11] *Symposium* 206 C–E.

it dwells. Plotinus therefore must deal with it, and he does so in his own way.

Plotinus is equivocal about the idea of procreation, or engendering. He certainly acknowledges that Plato talks about bringing forth in beauty, but only to say that of course it is said that procreating takes place in beauty, since doing so in ugliness would make no sense at all. But he immediately distances himself by saying that those who are content with engendering in the literal sense are simply content with the lower level of images and bodies. Such people, actual physical lovers and their babies or other projects, are not part of this higher scene of gazing upon beauty, 'since the archetype is not present to them, that which is the cause of their loving even what is here below'.[12]

Plotinus chooses one element of Plato's phrase, procreating in beauty, and focuses on that – beauty – the most congenial part, for the sake of which everything exists. But he seems to feel obliged to dismiss ordinary sexual experience and the urge towards procreation, and does not take up this aspect of Plato's story about love, except to find it a difficulty. We comment on this further below, and in particular on Plotinus' condemnation of the desire to procreate as representing a lack of self-sufficiency: the conflict for Plotinus probably lies with his desire to make love a form of contemplation, almost static in character. He wants none of the upheaval or creativity which Plato's model carries with it. Further, he wants no ugliness at all – and even where a man falls in love (and it seems to be about a man) with a beautiful woman, which is laudable enough, if this is a contaminated, physical kind of love, all he is doing is trying to perpetuate himself. If he should be falling in love with someone who is not beautiful, then he fails on both counts. And it may even be possible to fall in love with the ugly because of love itself. So that it is possible to fail on several counts: first, that of being interested in procreation itself; secondly, that of falling in love with someone beautiful but allowing this love to subsist at a physical level only; and thirdly, that of falling in love with someone ugly, presumably by an error of major proportions.[13]

Engendering is for the weak, and for those who fail in self-sufficiency. Plotinus is quite clear in his condemnation.

[12] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 33. [13] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 55–66.

In the end love for Plotinus arises out of a deficiency which results from its embeddedness in matter, itself lacking form, and a natural fit for Poverty in Plato's story. But love is also a driver towards the Good:

> Thus indeed Love is a material being, and he is a spirit produced from soul, insofar as the soul falls short of the good but aspires to it.[14]

So we end the treatise on love on a positive note: that there is a natural aspiration towards the good, and this comes from the very formlessness of matter itself. Where the good is lacking, for that very reason there is a drive towards it. This is the fundamental reason for optimism in Plotinus' world. As we considered the evidence in reflecting on this book, we have begun to wonder whether Plotinus' view of life in this immanent world may not be more positive than is often portrayed. So much of the negative side has a positive aspect to it: love, whilst being a symptom of need, is also part of the drive towards the good found in inchoate matter. Difference or otherness, apparently the agent of falling away into multiplicity, also has a positive side in awakening Intellect (see Chapter 7). Every coin has two sides. Is there anything purely and irredeemably negative?

When one considers also the strong emphasis on *to oikeion* and *oikeiotes*, with the rich Stoic background of these terms, we can see that Plotinus lived in a secure universe. The words denote a reality which is appropriate, one's own, and of one's own nature. Coupled with the very strong emphasis on having, which we have been at pains to emphasise, the notion of the appropriate level of reality gives a sure foundation for being. One has and is, what is both real, and of our own nature. Plotinus lives in a world where the *parousia* of the One provides a safe stronghold for the individual self: there is nothing stronger than incontestable ownership.

And so we have sought to find in Plotinus a pleasure in living, against the picture of him ashamed of being in the flesh, undesirous of having a portrait painted, horrified by the public baths, a reluctant earth-dweller. The more we look, the more do we find: art (*techne*) is the mirror of the divine (Chapter 8), a more positive position than that taken by Plato, since Plato seemed unwilling to grant art that kind of access. We know of Plato's exploration of art (*techne*) in the

[14] *Enn.* III.5(50)9, 56–58.

Republic and the *Ion*, and we know of his ultimate unwillingness to grant the artist any special insight, or any privileged grasp of the forms; Plato does not seem to think that the arts show any capacity to grasp the transcendent, and considers that insight at this level is a far higher achievement than that given to the artist or craftsman. This is a puzzling aspect of Plato, and in Book X of the *Republic* he seems to go out of his way to select examples which are unfavourable to the case for art.

But with Plotinus we find art (*techne*) almost to be hypostatised, but in any case it is the 'mirror of the divine'. The imitation (*mimesis*) which Plato sees in art – and sees as a weakness – is here turned to good account, in that for Plotinus art is that which procures the imitation of the divine. This is the step which Plato seemed not to want to take.

Plotinus seems most sensitive to religious statuary: at times, though, he deprecates art almost in Plato's fashion (again there are two sides to each coin) as creating nothing but toys. On the whole, however, *techne* is a forming principle, one which brings form to matter: matter may resist it, but art in itself is pure. This means that reality is preserved from its worst falling away into matter by the existence of a reified principle, a creative and harmonising *techne*. It seems to be a part of Plotinus' world view that wherever there is disorder or alienation, there must be an ordering force arising out of that disorder and which operates against the negative. This provides him with a very positive view of being in the world.

We will consider the art and the portraiture of his time, which placed so much emphasis on the ethereal and upward gaze. At times he expresses his wonderment at the physical things around him; we will argue that he is more struck by the beauty of living faces than of portraits or crafted faces, in that the living being is closer to the essence of things than an inert representation, but at times is carried away by wonderment at all of it, both images and living faces. Anyone who sees the beautiful things of the world of the senses will be unable to refrain from asking: 'What are these things, and whence?'[15]

He who does not ask such a question will have failed to understand both the realities here below and those yonder. Plotinus writes as one

[15] *Enn*. II.9(33)16, 55.

able to be captivated by the physical beauty surrounding him, not as one impervious to it. We note that he sees colours used by artists as lights which, when applied to a statue or to a backdrop, bathe the darkness of matter with light. The universe is filled with light, contrary to the view of the Gnostics, who see it as plunged in darkness.

It is clear that for Plotinus the human face is a thing of great beauty, and a perfect symbol for the realities above. And so we find a Plotinus who is at home in the world, enchanted by it, with an enormous sense of assurance about where he belongs and what he has, clear about his direction and what works for the better, seeing traces of the true beauty all around him, but particularly in the faces of his fellow human beings. The emotion and anger inherent in his denunciation of the Gnostics show a Plotinus well pleased with his world, and full of reverence towards it. The Gnostics despise even what is beautiful, he complains.[16]

Let us not be over-influenced by the idea of his being ashamed to be in the body. His whole philosophy points in the direction of his being thoroughly at home in the All.

[16] *Enn.* II.9(33)17, 31.

CHAPTER 1

The individuated self and memory

We may begin with the proposal that if Plotinus invented the individual self, he may also have contributed to the invention of the autobiography in the form of the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, a Christian writer who was a reader of the Greek Neoplatonists. We speak of the self in what may be termed the pre-postmodern, Cartesian sense. This self is conscious of itself as well as of other things, and focuses in an individual way on its own experiences and its moral and epistemological tasks. We will argue throughout that Plotinus developed and accepted the idea of the fully embodied self, that his refusal of the flesh has been somewhat overdone, and we speculate that this self may well lie behind Augustine's development of the autobiography, and his own very conscious self-explorations in the *Confessions*. Plotinus took the ego into history, through his exploration of the self, but because he had no interest in history and specifically the history of human individuals, he took it no further. The true way forward lay in superseding the sphere of history, in going back up to what lay before. Augustine, on the other hand, was ready for the historical self since the early Christian movement had hardened into a church, and this church was beginning to write histories of itself. We know that Plotinus sought to supersede the body, that he was ashamed of the flesh, that he sought to escape otherness, but Plotinus the philosopher never writes anything off. The perfection of the All means that nothing is isolated from being: all matter is impregnated with form (*logos*), and it is therefore preserved in some way. Nothing can be written off. But on the other side, a religious movement which embraced history may well have felt at home with the idea of 'one's own self'. And Plotinus' view of the self, as we shall attempt to show, is very much tied up with being one's own, and being what one possesses.

We do not know exactly which Neoplatonist books Augustine actually read, though the question was searchingly examined by Courcelle, who concludes that he may have read *some* of Porphyry and *some* of Plotinus.[1] Courcelle also believes that Plotinus pondered the question of self-knowledge throughout his work: he does after all cite with approval Heracleitus' words; 'I searched myself'.[2] Courcelle's monumental work[3] on the Greek sources of Augustine changed forever the way the intellectual history of the period is viewed, and we do not find there any confirmation of the above suggestion: yet Augustine's whole self-analysis sounds like a rhetorical deployment of Plotinus' more austere and abstract 'we', a 'we' in which 'ownness' and 'one's own' is strongly emphasised.

The Plotinian self thus moves through the Augustinian invention of the autobiography, and leads on into a medieval consciousness of the individual self as mover, knower, instigator and moral agent.[4] We shall investigate both the historical dimensions of this view, and the self as Plotinus conceived it.

In general this is a matter of some significance, because the individual has not always been a feature of Western political consciousness, and the present era has known an emphasis on the rights of the individual, and indeed the practical self-expression of individuality, in a way which has never been known before. The individual self is intimately involved with the unfolding history of capitalism, itself linked to a certain concept of democracy and the rights and obligations of individuals. Thus, the question of Plotinus' contribution, if he is indeed the inventor of this individuated self, is not insignificant.

An illuminating comparison can be made between Plotinus and Augustine through considering Augustine's autobiography, the *Confessions*. The latter is often represented as the first autobiography, with Augustine as its inventor: it is true that there are precedents, with the personal style of the letters of St Paul, for example, the *Res Gestae* of Augustus, the seemingly personal novel represented by Apuleius'

[1] Pierre Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, Etudes Augustiniennes, 1963), p. 538.

[2] *Enn.* V.9(5)5, 31; Pierre Courcelle, *Connaîs-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard* (Paris, Etudes Augustiniennes, 1974), p. 83.

[3] Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris, E. de Boccard, 1968).

[4] cf. Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (London, SPCK, 1972), p. 16 ff.

Metamorphoses, or the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, but clearly with the *Confessions* we have a lengthy and deliberate examination of the self and its personal history for most of the book, straying at the end into a philosophy of the self and other matters. The author appears to believe that the examination of his own self, the account of his own development in space and in history, can provide the basis of a literary work: no longer an element in passing, by way of illustration, but the main theme; no longer the history of others, seen externally, but the history of the personal self or ego.

The historiography of late antiquity was characterised by a preoccupation with *praxeis*,[5] acts, and the moral dimension of peoples and nations revealed by their behaviour: Plutarch narrowed the focus to individuals, but still the self is seen in these contexts as *another*, an external persona. But Augustine's self is known intimately, and here the author is complicit in the story, participating in it: with his autobiography the externality of the self is gone. Consciousness is present: the *praxeis*, the acts, become events which unfold within the perspective of the self, not of the other. The public persona is not the focus of attention. That is not to say that there is no clinical element in Augustine's own self-description: he does observe himself attentively, he does wish to analyse his own behaviour. He desires to understand. But understanding comes with the engagement of the self with his personal past and the intervention of his God.

What are the distinguishing features of this autobiography? First, there is the element of confession: it is easy to overlook this fact since the genre has been copied so many times, and the title used. Augustine presents the recital of his life to God: the literary structure of the work presupposes a listener, who is also judge and who is himself worthy of praise. The *confessio laudis* in the biblical sense helps construct this story and so it is not only about the sins and adventures of the author, but is also a statement of the greatness of God and an articulation of praise.

Secondly, the book derives its unity from the presence of the author: the authorial pursuit of meaning is everywhere, inquiry into

[5] See my *The Idea of Universal History: From Aristotle to Eusebius* (New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 1996) passim.

the significance of events, and the need to evaluate; one feels the personal anguish of the subject, who asks questions of himself at all stages. It is a case of the pre-postmodern author, the author prior to deconstruction. This author knows almost everything, does not withdraw, and imposes his own analysis. There are therefore two selves: the subject of the tale, and the author who is always present, always manifest.

Thirdly, the examination of the self in the *Confessions* intends to be entirely honest. Since he confesses to God, who knows all and judges all, the author cannot allow himself to falsify or reshape events, alibis and excuses being excluded. In this attempt to describe himself, or rather to define himself, the author cannot offer himself the luxury of hiding or evading the truth. Thus, the anguish and sense of personal torment which emerges from the book: the little evasions and obfuscations which assist the author of a conventional autobiography as we know it are not available here, since there is an all-knowing observer who is present precisely to watch over such matters. There is therefore a second presence informing this autobiography: God himself. The author is a kind of intruder, always present as analyst and commentator, always in the process of observing his historical self within a spiritual context, but he is far less present than the addressee of the *Confessions*, God himself, who does not allow for one moment either forgetfulness or evasion. It is in fact the combination of the two presences which makes the work: it is by juxtaposing the sense of the personal self with that of the superior and transcendent self that Augustine creates his unique work.

Memory is crucial in this pursuit of the historical self: the reader of the *Confessions* will recall that the first nine books contain the recital of the life of Augustine, but the tenth undertakes a philosophical examination of the concept of memory, the instrument through which the author retraces the continuity of his personal history. In x.2 he establishes the principle that nothing is hidden before God, that all is open and transparent before him. The relationship is not exactly parallel, since while all is known by God, man does not know all about himself.

Nevertheless, Augustine is seized with the magnificence of this instrument, and exclaims over its power: *venio in campos et lata praetoria memoriae* (x.8); but the vast palaces of the memory into

which he comes are not sufficient for the complete knowledge of oneself. Hence, a kind of paradox: he who knows imperfectly his own life, recites it to him who knows it perfectly. *Nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum* (x.8): 'I cannot grasp all that I am'. The reason for this oddity is that the process of recollecting and describing one's recollections falls within the realm of a spiritual discipline.[6] We reach now a point of comparison with Plotinus, since this question of self-knowledge is well constructed in his writing, but the treatment of memory is spectacularly different.

Here is the historical question: is Plotinus the inventor of the self, and the possible source of the autobiography in the Augustinian style? Is the work of the Christian Augustine the development of an idea foreshadowed in Plotinus, who is after all the first person to use the term *hemeis* ('we') to refer to a being other than the physical or historical person? We may never know the answer to this question – whether this is one of the themes embraced by Augustine from the 'books of the Platonists'.[7] Certainly there is much in what follows, as we isolate some of Plotinus' themes, which could well have caused Augustine to meditate on the individual self: the theme of memory and its link to the individual; the strong emphasis on the individual instantiated in matter; the 'kingship' of the individual; even the word (*logos*) in matter, despite Augustine's own remarks on the absence of this idea in the Platonists. Plotinus even appears to offer a foreshadowing of the autobiography by arguing that 'we' are indeed capable of thinking about ourselves, and that we are characterised by our own 'watching over our impulses and thought processes'. Of course we reflect upon ourselves, he says.[8]

But we may ask the following question: if indeed Plotinus had the idea of the self and of the personal consciousness, and if indeed he believed in a trans-historical and individual and personal identity, why did he not himself undertake such an examination? Why was

[6] See G. J. P. O'Daly, 'Le moi et l'autre dans les Confessions d'Augustin' in G. Aubry and F. Ildefonse (eds.), *Le moi et l'intériorité* (Paris, Vrin, 2008), p. 159, on memory and the self in Augustine, in particular the idea that the memory is a force (*vis mea*), which is distinct from the ego. See also an English version in Pauliina Remes, with Juha Sihvola (eds.), *Ancient Philosophy of the Self* (Netherlands, Springer, 2008), p. 195 ff. See p. 196 for the discussion of Augustine's identification of mind, 'I', and memory.

[7] *Confessions* VII.9.13. [8] *Enn*. II.9(33)1, 44.

the autobiography left to the Christian writer? Could Plotinus have been tempted by the historical dimension and the examination of his personal past or even that of others? If he was aware of the personal self, why did he not develop the idea? In short, could Plotinus have written an autobiography?

Let us review the scholarship. A number of secondary authors have given their opinion on the Plotinian self. Bréhier[9] says that Plotinus appears to have intuited the idea of a genuinely subjective activity, which could not be reified or made into a hypostasis: the self, that is who we are for ourselves, could not in Bréhier's view be the same as the soul. Dodds[10] believes Plotinus to have been the first to distinguish between the self and the soul, Dodds using the word 'ego'. 'The ego is the fluctuating spotlight of consciousness'.[11] We note that the spotlight 'fluctuates' according to Dodds, and this puts one in mind of a passage of Trouillard: 'the self is perpetual polyvalence and oscillation'.[12]

Yet others have proposed that Plotinus is the inventor of the self: Richard Harder,[13] W. Himmerich[14] and Gerard O'Daly[15] in the book which proved seminal, also put forward this view. More recently, Lloyd Gerson[16] provides a substantial study in the psychology of Plotinus, in the course of which he distinguishes between the endowed self and the ideal self.[17] By 'endowed' Gerson means something like the mirror stage of Lacan: that is, the self whom I observe becoming constituted in all aspects, its tastes, its fears, its dispositions, and which I recognise as if in a mirror to be myself. The ideal self is the self of one's aspirations, the ideal which, once realised, would represent a transformation of the endowed self. Pauliina Remes' work, *Plotinus on Self*,[18] has set a new benchmark for research in the area, and

[9] E. Bréhier, *La philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, Boivin & cie, 1928), p. 68.
[10] Entretiens Hardt V, *Les Sources de Plotin* (Vandoeuvres/Geneva, Fondation Hardt, 1960), p. 385, also in the article E.R. Dodds, 'Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus' (1960), *Journal of Roman Studies* 50: 1–7.
[11] *Ibid.* p. 6. [12] J. Trouillard, *La purification plotinienne* (Paris, PUF, 1955), p. 26.
[13] R. Harder, *Einleitung zu Plotin* (Hamburg, Fischer-Bücherei, 1958), p. 19.
[14] W. Himmerich, *Eudaimonia: Die Lehre des Plotins von der Selbstverwirklichung des Menschen* (Würzburg, Tritsch, 1959), pp. 92–100.
[15] G.J.P. O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self* (Shannon, Irish University Press, 1973), p. 4.
[16] Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 141 ff. [17] *Ibid.* p. 141.
[18] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

will be discussed below. The important translation, commentary and discussion of *Ennead* 53 (I.1) by Gwenaëlle Aubry is discussed below, and is indispensable reading for those interested in the Plotinian self: she considers that the 'we' of Plotinus is neither the ego, nor the self; it is better defined as the passage between the empirical, embodied self and the separated, essential self. She considers that Plotinus seeks to describe the process, rather than define it.[19]

The Cartesian problem is raised in Sara Rappe's important article:[20] here, the question put is about the philosophical appeal to the subjective. The Cartesian method implies, according to Sara Rappe, the use of self-reflection as a philosophical procedure of investigation. The pure mind is infallible because it is conscious of every event which occurs within itself. Sara Rappe considers the Cartesian question to provide an excellent starting point for considering Plotinus: it is in fact the question of the relationship of the consciousness to itself. Can consciousness inquire into itself? Can consciousness grasp itself?

The approach in question is heuristic in character, but even if we consider Plotinus within the framework of a Cartesian analysis, it is nevertheless true that Plotinus never put consciousness to the test in quite this manner. Plotinus would never have proposed that the content of consciousness should be considered indubitable, since on the contrary such elements were often subjected to the apophatic method. Nevertheless, the article is important because it is true that Plotinus does attempt the analysis of his conscious experience – 'thought experiments' to use the terms of Sara Rappe.[21] She quotes a passage of Plotinus which raises the question of knowing Intellect:

> It is without doubt impossible unless you abandon the man that you are, firstly the body, then the soul which forms the body, then the sensations, the desires, anger and other such futilities which tend to make us incline towards perishable things.[22]

Sara Rappe sees in this process of abstraction the abandonment of the pre-postmodern author who has been the subject of discussion in

[19] Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Plotin, Traité 53* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2004), pp. 27, 29.
[20] Sara Rappe, 'Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the Enneads' in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 250 ff.
[21] *Ibid.* p. 268. [22] *Enn.* V.3(49)9, 3.

contemporary and literary theory. The argument may be presented as follows: this speculative self, this eye which watches over and judges, that of the author, has been denounced in the postmodern tradition as the reification of a linguistic convention, the 'I' of general discourse. The invention of an interior being, the ego, is very clear in the Cartesian tradition, but all of this construction of the internal being has been placed in doubt by contemporary philosophy. Plotinus, however, does not participate in the reification of this self which is the target of the postmodern movement; in Sara Rappe's view, Plotinus moves in a contrary direction, in that he enlarges the frontiers of the self in such a way that there are virtually no limits to it. The self embraces plenitude: it remakes itself and reconstructs itself continually, continuously moving towards the All and transforming itself within the All.

All of this analysis is correct in our view and makes an important point: in spite of those commentators who present Plotinus as the inventor of the self, he is not a proponent of the self in the sense targeted by the postmodernists. We will return to this issue, but note here the enlargement of the self envisaged in the Plotinian meditation.

Let us consider memory. We have seen the importance of memory, the vast fields and palaces of memory, for Augustine. Not only is memory the principle of continuity of the self, but it is also the source of his autobiography. Gerson[23] is very clear on the point that the continuity of the self, of both the endowed self and the ideal self, does not depend on memory. It should be noted that Gerson imposes the distinction between the endowed self and the ideal self, and this dichotomy affects the interpretation of Plotinus throughout his book. In support of his view, Gerson quotes passages which talk of the abandonment of the body, of the soul moving upwards and abandoning the experiences of the lower regions, and so on. For example:

> So we must 'fly from here' and 'separate' ourselves from the things which have been added to us, ceasing to be the composite thing, the ensouled body, in which the bodily nature has particular power.[24]

[23] Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 144. See also Richard King, *Aristotle and Plotinus on Memory* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009), p. 239.

[24] *Enn*. II.3(52)9, 20 ff.

For Gerson, the abandonment of the composite nature also implies the abandonment of memory. The pursuit of the ideal self involves the extinguishment of the 'endowed' self, and several passages are cited in support of this hypothesis.

Let us deal with the question of memory. First, memory (*mneme*) is linked to individuality. Let us consider the following passage:

> But the soul which leaves the intelligible world and does not hold fast to its unity, and embraces its own individuality, wishing to be other (*heteron*), and which leans out so to speak – this soul takes memory.[25]

Memory is thus closely tied to individuality and with the desire to be other, that is, other than the transcendental unity. Again, memory is a function of separation from the One: departure, otherness and fragmentation are the preconditions for memory. Memory is associated not with unity but with separation from the One. The individual is a fragment, not a unity. Further, memory exists only in time: it does not exist within Intellect, or in God:

> How can that which stays in an identical and completely similar state come into memory, when it neither has nor possesses another way of being different from that which it had before . . . so that it might stay in one and remember the other which it had before?[26]

There is neither before nor after, according to this passage, in the regions which do not have memory. Here we have the second principle of memory: the first requirement is departure from the One, and the second is participation in the before-after process. The first requirement is separation or fragmentation, and the second is being part of a linear and temporal process.

Gerson considers that these passages are about 'the endowed self', but this is not a term of Plotinus and we will here keep close to the text: up to this point the matter is fairly simple, in that memory is tied to linear time and fragmentation from the One. In the passages where memory is at issue, Plotinus develops a contrast with Intellect: the activity of Intellect is available to us, but not insofar as we are beings endowed with memory. Immutability is characteristic of the

[25] *Enn.* IV.4(28)3, 3. [26] *Enn.* IV.3(27)25, 18–21.

intelligible world (*ametableton*: IV.4(28)2, 25), things are not distinguished from each other and Intellect is its objects. The soul is up to this point identical to the Intellect. Nonetheless, Plotinus seems to preserve within the soul an element of the prior state, now plunged into memory:

> In this state, it cannot change: but has an alterable relationship with intelligence, having at the same time consciousness of itself since it is one and the same thing with its intelligible object.[27]

The absence of change appears to be the essential condition of intellection, but even here there exists consciousness of itself. One wonders whether consciousness embraces these series of events in time, which are grasped in the memory. There are in fact two questions: on the one hand, does the consciousness within intelligence retain something of life in time, of the content of memory?; and on the other hand, does memory retain an element of the intellectual union which characterises the higher state? The question turns on that of the unity of the self: if there exists a fundamental unity underlying all the transformations and movements from above to below, from one place to another, from one moment to another, then one would expect that there remains something of that union between intelligence and being in the incarnate experience, just as there remains something of the human and temporal person in the higher moments.

There is memory of the higher things (IV.3(27)32, 12–17): one could lead a life of such a kind that one's memories are retained. A remarkable passage speaks of the capacity to retain noble memories in one's voyage towards higher things. It is important to understand this passage, which is taken by Gerson (p. 182) as a kind of disavowal of Platonism:

> But what of the memories of our friends and children and wife: of our country and of all the things which one might expect a good man to remember. On the one hand one remembers each of these with emotions, but the good man would have his memories of them without emotion.[28]

Here we have a similar reflection on memory to that found in Augustine, but in a more reserved way, and with two forms of

[27] *Enn.* IV.4(28)2, 30–2. [28] *Enn.* IV.3(27)32, 1 ff.

memory specified, one which recalls with emotion and the other neutrally, without emotion. Further on in this passage, Plotinus distinguishes between the lower and upper souls: we have therefore two souls, which are of course intimately linked, and two kinds of memory. The same introspection is present, for Plotinus offers an analysis of the products of his own consciousness, and it is here that he discovers the two memories. There is a familiar plausibility about his recollection: one can indeed record a personal event in a clinical or analytical way, or alternatively one can recall in an emotion-charged way, and the difference does not seem to be solely tied to the passage of time. Plotinus grafts an ontological structure onto this fact of the affective life, the distinction between the lower and higher worlds. Since the one must be considered higher, it is the neutral or clinical memory which is considered to be superior. This involves a curious result, namely, that the memory stripped of emotion is considered superior; but even higher than memory is forgetfulness. The celebration of forgetfulness constitutes the main theme of this entire passage (IV.3(27)32, 10–20): 'one may rightly say that the good soul is forgetful' (l.17). Forgetfulness is associated with the abandonment of the concerns of flesh, of history and of time, and above all of multiplicity. Forgetfulness draws us close to unity.

Here is the major point of differentiation between Augustine and Plotinus, because forgetfulness is the preferred state for the latter. In the *Confessions*, one cannot plead forgetfulness: the discipline lies in remembering. Of course, Plotinus does add remarks on the good emotions, and on the more noble memory which can lift itself into the higher soul, but the fundamental difference is clear. Forgetfulness is a virtue to be cultivated.

One is aware of the theme of *lethe* in Greek literature; the river of forgetfulness is mentioned by Strabo (3.3.4.5), sourced from the river Limaia, but there is also the myth of the river of forgetfulness in the lower regions. The souls of the dead drink out of this river after a period in Tartarus. The waters of this river had the power to produce forgetfulness and to lead the souls towards the extinguishment of all their experiences of the past, or indeed of their identity as it had been constituted by history. There is not much of this theme in the writings of Plato despite his preoccupation with the immortality of the soul and the separation of the soul from the lived history of each

individual. On the contrary, the theory of recollection is prominent (*Phaedrus* 249d ff.), according to which the fall of souls towards the earth is to some extent mitigated by the recollection of higher things. In fact, this entire passage of the *Phaedrus* provides a description of memory in full function: there remains a little of this higher world in each person, kept there by the memory. And the perception of something in this world which resembles an ideal being leads us to be 'struck with amazement, incapable of controlling ourselves, since we are scarcely conscious of what we perceive' (*Phaedrus* 250a). The body is a weight, a place of imprisonment, which greatly reduces the power of memory. Plato concludes this passage by calling it the eulogy of memory.

Plotinus reverses exactly Plato's view. On the one hand, Plato here speaks of the descent of souls, whereas Plotinus speaks about the rise of the soul towards the transcendental world. Of course, Plato can also speak of the soul flying upwards but he eulogises memory as a virtue of the celestial soul, whereas Plotinus considers it as a weakness which is characteristic of life in time and history, the life of the self in its non-transformed state. This is a real contradiction of Plato, and Plotinus turns the tradition on its head: he takes memory, which is a crucial element in the transcendental theory of Plato, and he places it in the self, which is the vehicle of the temporal and temporary life. And he places forgetfulness in the higher soul.

We have put the distinction very starkly and it should be said that there are some passages which are less clear than this. For example, the memory of noble experiences is permitted in the voyage upwards by Plotinus, since he does not wish to abandon completely any moral value which may be found in the life of this world. Discussing forgetfulness, Plotinus says one forgets everything 'unless perhaps one's whole life even here below, has been one such that memories are only of higher things'.[29]

This more positive view may be found again in line 23, where he states that a few things that are here are also there, though the soul in heaven will abandon still more. There is some kind of inconsistency here in that forgetfulness is held to be the valid treatment

[29] *Enn.* IV.3(27)32, 14–15.

for most events, but not for the highest experiences. Plotinus does develop the theory of the two imaginations, and of the two souls, which is developed in IV.3(27)31. Each of the two souls has its own memory and it follows that two kinds of imaginations are provided for, and in this passage there are said to be two kinds of memory, and a double image of each object is said to be available to the imagination. Plotinus considers the possibility that one type of memory might be dominant, and given that the higher soul may dominate the lower soul, that the principal memory could be within it. The other memory would accompany the first like a shadow, or in a very striking image: 'As if a little light slipped in under the greater one'.[30]

A weaker light then, supporting a more intense light. These are the two memories, the one being emotion-charged, and the other clinical and neutral. Our understanding is that the emotion-free memory corresponds to the more intense light of Plotinus' image.

Returning now to our starting point: why do we not find an autobiography or even a biography in Plotinus, the proclaimed inventor of the ego, as we do in his successor Augustine? We have touched on the cultural difference, with the Christian being part of a movement which valued history, and institutionalised it in the life of the church. But for Plotinus himself, the two memory theory also provides a response to this question: emotion-charged memory is to be abandoned in favour of that which is purged of its affective content. Furthermore, we have seen that forgetfulness itself is a higher state, even than the objective or clinical memory. Related to this is the question of the author in Plotinus, as raised by Sara Rappe and noted in our earlier discussion. The knowledge of the Intellect requires, according to V.3(27)9, 3 ff., the abandonment of the body, of sensations and desires as well as 'anger and other such futilities which make us inclined completely towards perishable things'. Under such circumstances the author of an autobiography no longer exists since the history of his life, at least his affective life, has been extinguished. The collection of histories, emotions or affective events which tend to make up a self, a being in time, is obliterated. There is no longer any story to be told in the manner of the *Confessions*: no story and

[30] *Enn.* IV.3(27)31, 12.

no author. On the other hand, Plotinus does stress the importance of memory for the being who exists in time, space and matter: for one such as Augustine who wished to emphasise history and progress in time, in keeping with the Judaeo-Christian world view, this part of his thinking may well have proved attractive.

CHAPTER 2

Memory and forgetting

We have seen that memory for Plotinus does not constitute the essence of the self and that in going beyond memory the self begins to develop its true identity. On the theme of forgetting, we have to take account of the passage of Plato's *Republic* (621C) which refers to the mythical account of the river of forgetfulness, Lethe. This mythical theme evokes the idea of the purification of the soul, which is essential for its immortal future.[1]

Plotinus interprets this passage in IV.3(27)26, 55, and considers the cause of forgetting to be the body itself. 'The nature of the body, moving and flowing, must be a cause of forgetting, but not of memory' (l.50). When elements are added to the soul, forgetting begins to develop, but when such additional elements are removed or purged, memory returns. It is probable that the reference to movement and fluidity is an attempt to pick up the reference to the river Lethe, and Plotinus makes the following very clear statement:

> Memory itself is stable and the cause of forgetting must be the moving and fluid nature of the body, but not of memory: this is why the river of Lethe might be construed in this way. (l.52–4)

There is an issue of translation here, in that the Greek *mone*s has here been translated as 'stable' above. Bréhier, for example, once chose to translate as 'alone', but the term does refer to the previous sentence, where clearly the notion of stability is involved. Further, we are dealing with a contrast between the stability of memory and the fluid and Lethe-like character of the body.

[1] On the subject of forgetting in Augustine, see Pauliina Remes and Juha Sihvola (eds.), *Ancient Philosophy of the Self* (Netherlands, Springer, 2008), pp. 173–4.

Returning to the philosophical issues, in this passage the status of memory is somewhat elevated. The soul must remember its own movements (l.35), its desires and consequent pleasures, or the absence of pleasure in cases where its object of desire was not attained. Remembering is the key to the consciousness of oneself (*synaisthesias*: l.45). The passage virtually contradicts itself, since it affirms that the body is an essential precondition of memory, bodily movement being necessary for desire to be satisfied or otherwise; and the soul retains the bodily experience within memory (l.38–40). But at the end of this discussion we find the passage we reviewed at the outset, according to which the body functions as the obstacle of the memory. Let us say for the moment that Plotinus seems to hold both positions, namely, that bodily experience is at once a precondition and an obstacle for memory, and that both things could conceivably be true, but at different moments.

It is clear at any rate that memory is the key to consciousness and to the intellectual functioning of the soul. In passing we may note that the Plotinian commentary on the river Lethe is said to be 'casual' by Armstrong in his Loeb note on the passage. Indeed, for those interested in the Plotinian interpretation of Plato's myths, this provides a very good example. Plotinus seems to allude to it for the gesture, not for the real content. He takes the river of Lethe to be the equivalent of the bodily movement which induces forgetfulness, but this forgetting is not that of the myth at the end of the *Republic*, which is a transcendental forgetting providing the soul with access to immortality. Plotinus' forgetting, here at least, is the forgetting caused by the weakness of the body, which at this very low level tends to produce a failure of consciousness, including forgetfulness. One might say that the reference to Plato's myth is of very little interest to Plotinus, and that the reference is virtually gratuitous: if it had not been in Plato it would not be found in this text, and it has no impact on the text of Plotinus. For Plato, the river of Lethe symbolises the transformation towards the higher, and towards immortality.

Let us consider a little more closely the passages which show forgetting in a positive light: in the preceding chapter I have dealt with its negative connotations. There is a long passage in the treatise on the soul in which there is much of interest, but

particularly important is IV.4(28)71 ff, on souls which migrate or change state:

> What then? Will they not remember that they saw God? But they see him continuously: and while they see him it is surely not possible for them to say they have seen him: this would be the experience of those who have ceased to see.

This passage expresses the major problem confronted by Plotinus, which is in fact not resolved but left as a dilemma. The problem is this: remembering a state implies that one is no longer in that state. Remembering the vision of god implies that this vision has been interrupted. Thus, he who remembers is no longer in a state of contemplation, but in free fall. Memory is about what is past. This is a difficulty for Plotinus because he does want to propose a fundamental role for memory in his ontology. The same problem is expressed in an earlier passage, IV.4(28)4, 7 ff., where it is said that when the soul is aware of possessing a certain disposition, it is already different in state from that disposition. If it is ignorant of the fact that it possesses a certain disposition, it may become what it possesses, and this is the key to its sinking lower.[2]

Thus, consciousness implies a certain rupture in the being of a person, exactly in the manner of the memory, as we have seen. Where there is consciousness, there is distance: a new stage will already have been completed, a new step will have been taken in the 'one step after another' process, or the one word after another process, as Augustine has it in the *Confessions*, in the famous passage on reading a psalm. Plotinus is attempting to come to terms with the linearity of the time-bound ontological process, with the notion of a continuity based on discrete units, one succeeding the other after a disjunction at each stage. Both consciousness and memory in Plotinus are caught up with this conceptual structure.

Ennead IV.4(28)4 offers a possible solution. The soul sees the Good through the intellect. The soul is not excluded, since there is no body presenting an obstacle to such vision, and Intellect is a force which is everywhere shared, everywhere available, and which illuminates.

[2] See Richard A.H. King, *Aristotle and Plotinus on Memory* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009), p. 193 ff.

Memory is not the only functional principle in this process of the transmission of knowledge:

> If the soul gives itself to what is below, it has what it wants in a manner which corresponds to its memory and imaging.[3]

And then the following words:

> This is why memory, even when it is of the best things, is not the finest of these.[4]

This passage may be interpreted as follows: the soul desires to produce, and to reproduce itself. It gives itself to that which is below it according to its capacity, the capacity contained in its memory and imagination, in its *mneme* and its *phantasia*. But these factors also limit its capacity, and the beings which emerge come from memory, not reality itself. For this reason memory is not the highest principle. Nevertheless, says Plotinus, we should not underestimate memory: it is greater than perception, for example. It is more than a retained perception, more than a perception which might have been represented on the face of the real through an act of creation. Memory exists in the disposition of the soul. This state of the soul comes out of events or contemplations which together comprise its own history. And it should be stressed that we are referring to a disposition of the soul, not a momentary phenomenon or the product of chance: it might appear that memory is accidental, momentary or at the mercy of a physical or affective state. Sometimes one remembers, sometimes one does not. But Plotinus seems to be saying here that memory is stronger than a nervous impulse, but rather more like a substrate of being. Memory is for him a disposition of the soul, offering a certain stability.

The following passage is very difficult, but it does repay careful study since all the ambiguity surrounding memory in Plotinus is contained within it:

> For it could happen that, even when one is not aware that one has something, one has it in oneself more strongly than if one knew it.[5]

This passage picks up an important theme in Plotinus, concerning a person's ignorance. This has also been addressed in Chapter 3,

[3] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 5 ff. [4] *Ibid.* lines 6–7. [5] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 10–11.

'Ignorance, love and play'. There is a theme in Platonism generally about self-knowledge, which is well-known, but we may also point out the interest of the theme of self-ignorance. The actors in the human drama are often ignorant of the rules of the game, or indeed that it is a game, and there is some play on words here involving 'play' or 'game' (*paizein*).

Here, however, the idea of ignorance is deployed differently: in this case ignorance of what is contained in memory is seen as a subconscious force. Ignorance, or lack of knowledge of the presence of a something in the soul, may mean that the thing is present with more force. This view depreciates significantly the role of the conscious mind, in favour of a kind of subconscious which is capable of directing the person in a given direction. This is not a matter of forgetting: what is at stake is the lack of knowledge on the part of memory, in that the contents of memory are not grasped or contained in knowledge. Memory may be extinguished by forgetting, but there remains present a kind of substrate, active in its way, and continuing to function: the sphere of ignorance.

Continuing to follow Plotinus, knowledge of the content of memory means that the knowing person is in a different state: 'Perhaps if one knew, one would hold the object of knowledge as something else, being different oneself'.[6]

Thus, there is a consequence of knowing the contents of memory, namely, that there is differentiation between knower and the ignorant, resulting from grasping the object of knowledge as something other, thus becoming other oneself. Further, says Plotinus, if you are unaware of the content of your memory, you may become what it is.

This is a remarkable view, first, in that we see memory emerge virtually as another identity, but more importantly, that we have foreshadowed here the idea of the subconscious. We have concentrated thus far on the ego, *to hemeis*, but here we have, perhaps also for the first time, the notion of the subconscious or unconscious, existing in a stable and settled form. If the consciousness grasps this subconscious substrate, it produces a difference between itself and

[6] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 11.

the substrate in that an otherness emerges within the self. And as Plotinus says: 'if one is unaware of what one has, one is liable to be what one has'.[7]

This is a question of self-knowledge: if I know myself sufficiently well to know that I have some subconscious tendency, let us say any impulse towards good or evil, I will tend to come to grips with the situation, perhaps by endeavouring to suppress such desires, or perhaps by promoting them. Either way, knowledge of one's state produces a change in behaviour. Ignorance of such an underlying state allows such an impulse to develop itself in an unconstrained way, since no process of recognition and reorientation occurs. The contents of this faculty, for Plotinus, evolve in their own right and that is why in his view the soul runs the risk of being what it possesses within it. The consequences of this are vast: self-ignorance goes its own way, whilst memory is to do with the construction of awareness and contemplated experience,[8] which constructs the person through a series of new othernesses.

There follows an interesting phrase: we have seen that if one is ignorant of what one has in memory, one runs the risk of becoming what one has there. Plotinus continues with these words: 'It is certainly this experience which brings about the fall of the soul'.[9]

This is an interesting position in that an unconscious or subconscious activity is credited with a negative capacity. This might be the correct interpretation, but we have customarily interpreted talk about 'having' (see later chapters) as being intended in a positive sense. When Plotinus speaks of 'becoming what one has', he will normally be referring to capturing something of one's own authentic being. And he has just been referring to memory as a process of continual descent, as it involves becoming something other. Yet there is no doubt that the text here appears to be suggesting that a state of ignorance, a subconscious state, leads to the fall of the soul.

It could be considered that it is at this point that Plotinus is facing up to the Platonic tradition on *anamnesis* or recollection: for Plato the process of learning was actually a process of reminding. The

[7] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 13. [8] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 7–10. [9] *Enn.* IV.4(28)4, 13.

well-known story of the slave boy 'learning' from Socrates in the *Meno* is an illustration. On questioning, the boy is able to enunciate some basic principles of geometry, but this is not a process of learning so much as a process of being reminded. He has forgotten something he once knew, and crucial to the recalling or reminding process is the Socratic technique of cross-questioning, which stimulates the remembering process. The theory of *anamnesis* is also developed in the *Phaedo*: it is important to note that it is not a theory about innate knowledge, but about what has been learned by the immortal soul and temporarily forgotten. Plotinus' ignorance could be that slumber from which Socrates awakens us: but it is, of course, much more than that here. It is a force at play in the human personality.

But in looking at forgetfulness earlier in the chapter on memory, it was noted that forgetfulness was presented as a superior state. In dealing with the present passage, we might have expected that Plotinus was about to concede something to memory, along the lines of its being a positive force, in line with the Platonic *anamnesis* as the route to the recovery of the knowledge of the transcendent.

Plotinus is never simple, but what follows now does seem to provide an echo of the undoubtedly positive Platonic *anamnesis*. We will attempt to reduce the content of lines 14–20 to a number of propositions, as follows.

- When the soul leaves the intelligible it carries away with it memories of what is below.
- The soul possessed the memories 'in some way' (*hoposoun*) even when below. Why 'in some way'? Is there a problem? Yes, because memories are discrete in space and time, linear, and of course Plotinus has already said that memories are not the best of things.
- The soul possessed these memories in potential (*dunamei)*. Why so? Because the actuality (*energeia*) of the memories blurs the memory itself.
- Memory does not resemble a wax tablet, bearing the imprint of intelligible things.[10] The consequences of this position would be absurd.
- Memory is rather a potentiality (*dunamis*): the actualisation of this potentiality comes later.

[10] See King, *Aristotle and Plotinus*, p. 70 ff., on the possible Aristotelian background.

- When the actualisation process in the intelligible world stops, the soul sees what it had been seeing before it came to be in that world.

It appears then that when the actualisation activity (*energeia*) ceases, the soul remembers: prior to this, memory is blurred by the activation process, the activation of the potential. When the process stops, the soul remembers what it had seen thither, meaning probably 'above'. From these seven propositions, we learn therefore that memory is more akin to a potentiality, whether actualised or not, and, secondly, that the closer it is to Intellect, the less the actualisation process occurs. In departing from Intellect, the memory potential comes into activity, but even when close to Intellect memory exists, though in a way which is constrained and diminished by the presence of Intellect itself. Memory does not function in the presence of the intelligible because there is no need for it to function. Its role becomes important when the fall into the sensible occurs: at this stage it becomes crucial, and so the *dunamis* is transformed into *energeia*.

But it is also at this point that ignorance comes into play. While in proximity to intellect there was no question of lack of knowledge, but once the departure voyage is under way, ignorance becomes an issue. It is at precisely the moment in which knowledge begins to dissipate that the memory affirms itself and begins to self-actualise, as if to assist by standing in for knowledge. It is important to note that while all this constructs a positive role for memory, it is still the case for Plotinus that the 'memory of things here below carries it down'.[11]

In today's parlance, the subconscious is often identified with the unconscious. For Freud, the subconscious is that part of the mind which retains suppressed memories, and from this emerges the Freudian theory of repression, according to which memories which are too painful are hidden away and contained, only to re-emerge later in the form of neurotic behaviour, or in dreams. On the other hand, the subconscious of Jung is said to be universal, to contain all the great transcendental truths and is therefore part of every human being. Both these views may be interrogated by Plotinus: why would we say that the subconscious only contains painful or frightful

[11] *Enn*. IV.4(28)3, 5: see King, *Aristotle and Plotinus*, p. 161.

memories? Plotinus says explicitly that his 'subconscious' or, more precisely, sphere of ignorance, is unrelated to memory, and is simply what one 'has'. It is something like raw, unconstructed, being.

But in Freud's case it is the reservoir of painful memories and is thus tied to repression: these memories are said to reappear later in dreams, or perverse behaviour. For Jung the other alternative is canvassed, in that the subconscious is said to hold all the universal and transcendent truths. Neither subconscious is capable of empirical verification, nor that of Plotinus. But the idea of the subconscious remains pervasive and does not disappear. There is a continuing discussion on consciousness and on the difference between conscious experience and unconscious experience not subject to knowledge in the ordinary sense. Having consciousness of oneself is not necessarily the precondition of conscious activity, in that people with brain lesions may be able to talk intelligibly without having awareness of this fact. Neuroscience takes up the debate, and here memory is defined in terms of connections between neurons at certain points within the brain. The scientific study of the brain is now an element in the discussion, but speculative thinking about the unconscious or subconscious continues to develop alongside it.

There is some discussion of 'implicit memory'[12] as replacing the notion of repression. Memories may be lost not through suppression or repression, but because of some mechanical breakdown, through inattention or through being distracted. Memories are lost for all kinds of reasons, such as loss of consciousness, biochemical or hormonal imbalance. Generally, scholars in the field prefer to maintain a simple distinction between lost and retained memories, but we also encounter the idea of cryptomnesia, the manifestation or activation of memory without the consciousness of specific recollections. Somehow the idea of an active subconscious, functioning autonomously, without reference to the conscious mind, persists.

This is Plotinus' idea, with the difference that for him the 'subconscious' is that which may form the personality, and is not embraced under the category of memory. Memory is separate and has the function of bringing alive the intelligibles: this does not refer simply to

[12] D. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York, Basic Books, 1996), ch. 6.

an imaging ability, but with the actual bringing into being of the intelligibles. This is the theme of IV.4.5, on the contrast between memory and true vision.

> So does this same potentiality, through which remembering occurs, also bring [the intelligible realities] into actuality?[13]

This is the question about the power (*dunamis*) of memory: does it bring the intelligible to life within the individual? There is an answer in what follows, but the translation is very difficult:

> If we did not see them themselves it is through memory [that we see them], but if we did see them themselves it is through that which enabled us to see them thither. This faculty is awakened by that which awakens it, and this is the faculty which sees in the region we have spoken about.[14]

There may be differences over translation but the fundamental point is clear; in line 8 the principle of what we might call the homogeneity of powers is invoked. The capacity for seeing the intelligibles is the same there, as it is here below. We must not reason by conjecture (*eikasia*) or by syllogism when discussing the intelligible world: if one sees, one sees. There is no question of comparisons or analogies drawn from other areas. To speak of seeing by memory would be to engage in such comparative conjecture. By the principle of the homogeneity of powers, vision of the intelligibles takes place through the act of seeing, and memory produces recollections.

Memory arises out of the absence of something: if the thing were present, it would be seen, not remembered. But whilst this is true, memory is born of the celestial experience, and comes about at the moment of rupture during the descent. 'From this reasoning then it appears that memory begins from heaven, when the soul has already left the regions thither.'[15]

Change of state is clearly the precondition for the existence of memory, which is associated with defect, with descent from perfection and loss. The first part of *Enn.* IV.4(28)6 discusses souls which are subject to change and which undergo alteration: these souls remember. They have a past and therefore they remember. But those which remain in the same state do not remember. Also discussed here are

[13] *Enn.* IV.4(28)5, 1–2. [14] *Enn.* IV.4(28)5, 2–5. [15] *Enn.* IV.4(28)5, 11–12.

the stars and celestial bodies, the sun and the moon and the soul of the universe, and whether they possess memory, but the response is in the negative.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that memory arises from the descent towards the physical world, it retains an ability to see. We discussed earlier the homogeneity of the principles of knowledge, and despite the capacity of memory to evoke the being of the intelligibles, Plotinus considers that even below there is an attempt to grasp the intelligibles through some sort of seeing process (as if memory was not sufficient) through an exceptional vision like that from a mountain top:

> We must see the intelligibles in that world by arousing this faculty, and it is therefore within them that we arouse it: we are like people who have taken up a position on an elevated look-out, and by raising our eyes our gaze can embrace things which are invisible to those who did not go up with us.[16]

This is a special moment, a vision of the above, which is achieved even in these lower regions.

We have come close to a contradiction in this discussion of memory and forgetting, because in an earlier treatment we spoke of the celebration of forgetfulness (V.3(27)32), whereas in the present discussion we have dealt with the good aspects of memory, those aspects in which memory has a positive contribution. Above all, we have stressed the presence of a kind of subconscious in the thought of Plotinus, a subconscious which directs and orients a person in a possibly bad direction, outside the sphere of memory. Contradictions in the thought of Plotinus are always instructive, because there are usually two lines of the philosophy to be understood. Indeed, if one does not find contradictions, it is probable that one has misunderstood or treated his thought in too schematic a manner.

We saw earlier, in the words of Plotinus, that 'the good soul is forgetful' (IV.3(27)32, 17). But here we have dwelt on the positive function of memory, and both elements are present in Plotinus. On the one hand, he outlines the need to go beyond memory or to abandon it, and on the other, he recognises the important function of memory in preserving the experience of the intelligibles. And between the two lies the notion of the vision from below, caught

[16] *Enn.* IV.4(28)5, 11–12.

from the top of some mountain peak, which causes us to see in an exceptional way, a vision which is not shared by other people.

Memory is necessary and it does the work that it does, but it is there in order to be surpassed and outstripped in the highest moments of the life of the soul.

CHAPTER 3

Ignorance, love and play

Insofar as it is a whole, what exists is beautiful, says Plotinus.[1] He takes up the Greek book of Genesis, Plato's *Timaeus* (37 ff.), in order to demonstrate this point. The demiurge, the creator and craftsman of the *Timaeus*, is cited in evidence of the proposition that the world is beautiful: the craftsman, we are told, admires his completed work. And this is what the *Timaeus* says: just as Yahweh, the Hebrew God, sees his completed work to be good in Genesis 1.3 1, so the demiurge 'was delighted' (*Tim*. 37c) when he saw the world alive and moving, a 'veritable ornament for the eternal gods'. Since he was pleased, Plato says, the demiurge determined to make the world more like its model.

Plotinus does not quite put it like this. He does start with the view that what exists is a thing of beauty, and this is in a way his rejoinder to the Gnostics (see below). But Plotinus says that the demiurge approved his created work in order to point to the beauty of the Idea on which it was based. This didactic activity is somewhat different from the demiurge's spontaneous rejoicing in the *Timaeus*. Why does Plotinus' demiurge find it necessary to remind us of Platonic exemplarism at this point? There is a nuance in the interpretation here: Plotinus does not want the demiurge unabashedly admiring the physical world, with quite the same immediate spontaneity of Plato's text. Plotinus' corrective consists in making the demiurge more other-worldly. The essence of contemplation lies in looking

This is a substantially revised version of a paper first published in Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, Goulven Madec and Denis O'Brien (eds.), *Sophies Maietores. Hommage à Jean Pépin* (Paris, Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1992), pp. 263–74.

[1] *Enn*. V.8(31)8, 1.

above the world at form and the Intellect. The demiurge is looking in the wrong place.

But Plotinus' demiurge is not only more other-worldly: he is more knowing. He knows not to be seduced by the beauties of the physical world, and he knows to point out the dangers of this to others. Plotinus goes on to link this kind of knowledge, and ignorance, to the experience of lovers, in a way which will now juxtapose elements of the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*. He enunciates the principle that whenever someone admires something, he is really looking towards the model on which that thing is based. But, he says, if 'he does not understand what he is experiencing (*ho paschei*), that is not surprising. For lovers, and admirers of beauty in this world, do not know that it is because of this' *(Enn*. V.8(31)8, 15). Lovers are thus said to be ignorant of the source of their emotion: when struck dumb by admiration, they fail to understand. They should be directing their feelings towards the model, or idea, of the beautiful, rather than its sensible instantiation. Plotinus does not say this, but one feels that he is on the verge of accusing the demiurge of this misstep, with his unthinking enthusiasm for the created world.

There is an allusion here, noted by Harder, Beutler and Theiler,[2] to *Phaedrus* 250a8:

> Few then are left which retain an adequate recollection of them; but these when they see here any likeness of the things of that other world, are stricken with amazement and can no longer control themselves; but they do not understand their condition (*to pathos*), because they do not clearly perceive. (trans. H.N. Fowler, Loeb edn)

This passage from the *Phaedrus* comes as part of a discussion of divine madness, that kind which comes from remembering the true beauty on account of seeing the beauty on earth, and which causes one to stretch one's wings for a flight upwards. Such a person is called a 'lover' (*erastes*). The passage also refers to the doctrine of recollection, according to which every person has beheld the higher realities, and that is why they are innate. People can forget them, or be turned away from them through evil, 'forgetting the holy things they once saw'. This explains the ignorance of the lover, in the *Phaedrus* sense:

[2] R. Harder, R Beutler and W. Theiler, *Plotins Schriften* (Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1956–1971), p. 391.

the deep emotion which can result from an encounter with beauty is often not understood by the person who experiences it. This is the case where forgetfulness has intervened, meaning that a person is seized by a violent *pathos* but is unable to discern its cause, through having forgotten its source.

Plotinus clearly wants the demiurge to be the exemplar in this, in that the demiurge is seen as one who is not ignorant of his *pathos*. When he feels the emotion of delight before the beauty of the world, he understands the provenance of his emotion. He is in the happy position of understanding his desires. Plotinus does go further than this in making the demiurge more of an idealist than he is in Plato. The words 'was delighted', says Plotinus, refer to the model (*paradeigma*), on which the world is based.[3] Thus, the demiurge is said to have been delighted by the *model*, and then to have conceived the desire to make the world more like its model. Now this is clearly not what Plato said, in that in the *Timaeus* the demiurge rejoices on seeing the world: 'when he perceived it moving and alive . . . he rejoiced' (*Tim*. 37c).

Plotinus' correction of the tradition is designed to make the demiurge more other-worldly, and less inclined to think highly of the created or physical world. He seems to think that there is something unseemly about rejoicing over the physical world, and that the appropriate object for any outpouring of emotion is the model itself. This effects an important shift in Platonism: but it is important to understand its complexity. It may appear that Plotinus is much less at home with the body, the physical world, and the senses, than is Plato himself. But more exactly, Plotinus is at home with the physical world so long as it is grasped firmly within the context of the form with which it is endowed. In later chapters we emphasise that Plotinus accepts the full complexity of the physical world, including the embodiment of the human individual, precisely because Intellect must and does realise itself this way, through the forms, and ultimately into formed matter. Even things as absurd as horns represent the forms at work.[4] In any case, in Plotinus' world one might expect the ignorant lover to rejoice over physical beauty, but not the knowing lover. A sage like the demiurge must surely be in the position of getting it right about

[3] *Enn*. V.8(31)8, 16. [4] See above.

the true source of his emotion, and the true object of his admiration. He would not, like the unperceptive lover, delight over the physical body in front of him. Plotinus expects the demiurge to be the model in this respect.

The shift is clear: but as we have noted, Plotinus, in certain situations, is happy to be positive about the physical world. This is particularly the case with the writings against the Gnostics; in this context, Plotinus finds himself close to the position of the orthodox Christians, maintaining the value of the physical world. The Gnostics are the anti-cosmics, and they go far beyond anything either Plotinus or an orthodox Christian is prepared to say in terms of world-hatred. Plotinus speaks of the hatred the Gnostics have for the created world:

> Since they do not hold in honour the created world ('demiurgy') and our earth, they claim that there is a new land established for them, to which they will go when they leave here, and that this is the rational principle (*logos*) of the world. But what is there for them in the model (*paradeigma*) of this world, which they hate?[5]

Or this passage:

> Again, no: to have contempt for the world and the gods in it, and the other fine things, is not what makes a good man.[6]

And in II.9(33)17, Plotinus asks whether this hatred of the world comes from a distortion of Plato's transcendentalism, and takes the trouble to provide a restatement of it which involves finding the substance of the world beautiful and altogether admirable. Plotinus concedes that an outer, superficial, corporeal cover might have to be stripped away in the mind's eye, but the essential sub-structure will emerge, the 'intelligible sphere which contains the soul of the world'.[7] When he sees himself against the backdrop of the Gnostics, Plotinus becomes vociferous in his support for the beauty of the physical world. This does accord with his general principle that even matter is redeemed, so to speak, by the forms: we often neglect this side of Plotinus in our willingness to overplay the traditional view of Plotinus as a thoroughgoing transcendentalist, who despised the flesh,

[5] *Enn.* II.9(33)5, 23. [6] *Enn.* II.9(33)16, 1–2. [7] *Enn.* II.9(33)17, 5.

a tendency to which the present author unthinkingly subscribed. There is more to it than that.

There is actually an oddity in the passage of Plato's *Timaeus*, in that the demiurge is said to be delighted with the physical world, which is said to be regarded as an adornment (*agalma*) by the immortal gods. Despite this endorsement of it, the physical world is still said to be imperfect: the demiurge resolves to make it still more like its model. At the very point of approval and validation of the physical world, the notion of its continuing imperfection intrudes: the positive verdict on it seems to be the very basis for the renewed effort to make the world conform to the ideal model.

We know that Plato scatters hints of the imperfection of the demiurge's creation throughout the *Timaeus*. When the time has come to begin the creation, the demiurge creates a form of being which is essential for the task, and he does this by blending the Same and the Other, although they are naturally difficult to mix. He can only achieve this by force,[8] thus writing a fundamental tension into the very substance of which the world is created. And one of the basic building blocks, the right-angled isosceles triangle, has a surdic hypotenuse, a length that cannot be resolved into units. There is a suggestion here of inevitable irrationality in the world, built into its primary particles.

Elements such as this may lead us to understand the apparently strange fact that at the very moment at which the beauty of the cosmos is recognised, the demiurge is seized with the necessity to improve it, by rendering it more like its paradigm. The beauty of the cosmos is seen as a process built out of continuing aspiration.

Here is also the tension of the Platonism of Plato himself: at home with the physical, an admirer of the world, but inevitably caught up in the pursuit of the transcendent idea which overlies it. The shifts carried on by Plotinus reduce greatly this tension, since the attraction of the physical is more clearly abandoned. Despite his attack on the Gnostics, Plotinus is closer to them than to Plato: though one could never say that Plotinus 'hated' or 'despised' the physical world, his aspiration to move beyond it is clear. Plato, on the other hand, is caught with the problem of living a contradiction. The seductiveness

[8] *Tim.* 35b.

of the physical is more fully felt, but is negated as the quest for perfection immediately obscures the emotional experience.

The *Symposium* demonstrates this clearly enough, and of course this is the other text which underlies Plotinus' remarks in this passage. The *Symposium* develops a description of *eros* which sticks closely to the physical. Diotima's speech, which we take to be the authentic Plato, provides the lesson in *erotika*. How physical is Diotima? The passage begins by not answering this question, referring to love as a state of lack: in what is almost an apophatic definition, love is defined by what it does not have. 'Love . . . desires the very things that it lacks' (202d). It is a kind of intermediary (*metaxy*), which links human beings to the good and beautiful. The fact that it is devoid of both beauty and goodness makes of it a longing for these things: one cannot be devoid of such perfection without longing for it. Love is thus defined as a dynamic emptiness, whose emerging comes from its very emptiness. This is further refined in the allegory of Poverty and Plenty, where Love is presented as something of a desperado; ragged, unlovely, scheming, and altogether possessed by a graceless kind of guile. Plato here separates love and beauty, being concerned to make us see clearly that love itself should not be seen in the light of the aura cast by the amorous experience itself. The experience of a romantic attachment should not make us believe that *eros* itself is a fine or beautiful thing: it is not, it is hard, calculating and unlovely.

Plato moves from here to the pregnancy of the lover (206c). At a certain age we desire to beget: a man desires to bring forth, and when he is pregnant the birth-pangs begin when he is confronted with beauty. Beauty itself brings about this creative process, watching over it as Fate and Patroness of labour. We note here, and elsewhere in Diotima's speech, that there is an attentiveness to what might be called the phenomenology of sexual experience, the actual facts of human sexual behaviour. The specific genius of Plato's treatment is to create the transcendent parallel for each element of human sexuality; and this lays the foundation for the allegory of the erotic, which is so often developed in Patristic and Medieval Christian mysticism. The point here is that whilst transcendentalising, Plato follows the actual pattern of human sexual experience. The starting point is the physical. The transcendental world is mapped out through

observation of the physical. This is always the extraordinary factor of Plato's Platonism. The this-worldly is the paradigm of the other-worldly, or in other words, the physical world is the pedagogue for the spiritual world.

This close attention to the actual experience of physical love is ever more clear in the *Phaedrus*, from which dialogue the allusion to the ignorance of lovers is drawn. 'They will certainly do ill to the old love, if it pleases the new' (*Phaedrus* 231c); 'For lovers repent of the kindnesses they have done when their passion ceases; but there is no time when non-lovers naturally repent' (*Phaedrus* 231a).[9] The overall point being made here is that non-lovers are naturally more reliable than lovers, and these analytic observations on the behaviour of the romantically afflicted come from the mouth of Phaedrus, but Socrates takes over in similar vein, proceeding then to add the transcendental dimension. But the starting-point is always the peculiarities of the amorous behaviour of human beings.

This interest in the details of the physical, in the broad sense, is absent in Plotinus. The physical is there only insofar as Plotinus is an interpreter of Plato, but the turning away from physical love is quite clear. The nuance is best explained by reference to the reaction of the demiurge with which we began this chapter.

In Plato's case, the demiurge is spontaneously delighted by the physical world, but he goes on to improve it, despite this. In Plotinus' case the demiurge approves the physical world in order to direct attention to the model, or *paradeigma*, which comes before it. His delight is for the model, on Plotinus' reinterpretation. The difference between the two is symptomatic of a broad difference between the transcendentalism of the two thinkers, which could be put as follows. The map of the other-worldly for Plato is drawn on the basis of this world: for him a kind of mimetic parallelism ensures that the upper world is quite like this world. The clues to its outline come from the careful and attentive study of the sensible world. Plato is at home in his physical reality, endowing it with a careful scrutiny, and probably even the same delight as was felt by the demiurge, in order to understand its source. The paradigm for Plato is actually the physical world, though he has got us all believing that it is the

[9] Trans. H. N. Fowler, Loeb edn.

world of the Forms, or the Good itself, as the apex of the Forms. But in fact Plato always begins from what is, and takes us up to a facsimile above: he begins from physical love and slavishly follows it in order to determine what 'real' spiritual love is; he begins from the sun and analyses all its effects in order to understand the power of the Good, or the nature of the sovereignty of the Good, to use Iris Murdoch's phrase. Plotinus, however, looks away from sensible reality, and explicitly contradicts the kind of this-worldliness which I have attributed to Plato, as follows: 'For every image will be drawn from something worse'.[10]

Plotinus is looking at the problem of how to get a picture of the transcendent Intellect, and argues that one cannot do so without focussing on intellect itself. Any other metaphor or image will detract from it. Epistemically speaking, this is precisely the opposite manoeuvre to that envisaged by Plato, who does seek guidance from 'something worse', whenever in doubt about the transcendent.[11] Plato seems to want to learn from his physical surroundings, as if they are mimetically related to the realities above.

This tendency to turn away from the paradigm of the physical is what distinguishes Plotinus from Plato. That is why he has the demiurge rejoicing about the Form rather than at the sight of the physical world produced by it. Consonant with this is the idea that lovers must be ignorant: Plotinus' demiurge is not ignorant because he looks away and rejoices over the source of the world. But Plotinus' rejection of the earthly *paradeigma* leaves a residue: he has to explain the fact that people delight in earthly beauty, that lovers fall in love and that passion and joy over the good do exist. The demiurge is wiser in that he knows to divert his emotion, but the passion of the lover must be explained. Plotinus can only resort to the idea that it is a mistake. He is unable to take it at face value and cannot allow it to be legitimised in any way. Thus, it is written off as an error: the lover is ignorant. He delights in the pale reflection of beauty he sees in his beloved but does not know how to rank the beauty he sees.

[10] *Enn*. V.8(31)3, 12.

[11] One can see here the beginning of the Neoplatonic doubt about the use of argument by analogy, a technique of rational argument seemingly entrenched in Middle Platonism. See my *From Word to Silence* (Bonn, Hanstein, 1986), vol. II, p. 291 ('Analogy').

He is like a starving man who imagines himself to be content with a morsel, when a whole feast lies a mile further on.

There are two interesting philosophical issues here. Can one be delighted, and be ignorant about the cause of one's delight? Secondly, can one lightly take on the responsibility of saying that another human being's desires are mistaken? The second question assumes some sort of answer to the first, and taking the second question first, one may begin by noting a concern about those who take on the responsibility of telling human beings that they do not really want what they say they want. There is obviously a set of political parallels: the Marxist idea of false consciousness, used to explain why people persist in liking the bourgeois state, is used in just such a way. When the metaphysics contradict the empirical data about human life, in this case the Hegelian Marxist metaphysic, some such major misdirection in the system has to be postulated. When neither the bourgeoisie nor the workers want a collectivist state, though all the theory points to their having better, happier and richer lives under such a state, one has a lot of explaining to do. One obvious way out of it is to say that they are all mistaken, or suffer from 'false consciousness'. And the danger here is that following this diagnosis comes the need for correction, or compulsory enlightenment. When one knows better, the dangers of one's seizing power are very great.

Plato's *Republic* shows us the path that the enlightened one can follow; the whole thrust of the work is that the philosopher has a better grip on reality than any other citizen. Philosophers, since they understand the world more clearly (because they apprehend the Forms), must be placed in a situation of social control. Power must be concentrated in their hands and removed from the unknowing. Plato's ideal state is rigid and oligarchic, with many individual freedoms suspended, and the ignorant cannot be trusted to run the state because they either do not know, or refuse to recognise, that they are ignorant.

These consequences for political theory may not have the same impact when dealing with ignorant lovers. Their mistake, in being preoccupied with each other, is not so bad. One can try to break into their intimacy in order to redirect their attention to the real thing, and here may be the political danger for the lover in the ideal city of the Platonist: lovers around the city could be called in for re-education,

and pointed towards the Form of the Beautiful. The risk for lovers would be very great, and the responsibilities of the government would take an unexpected turn: on the lookout for lovers, it would be ready with the theory of Forms.

Can one be ignorant of the cause of one's delight? One can be ignorant about matters of fact, clearly enough, but where it is a question of an emotion, such as joy or delight, or love itself, there is a question. There is certainty about the fact that one is experiencing delight, but no certainty about its source. For example: one may enter a room after a cold day and appreciate the warmth; one is certain that one now feels warm, but one may conclude that the warmth comes from a heater, whereas in fact it comes from another source such as a sun-trap in the room next-door.

If this is all Plotinus is saying, namely, that the lover is ignorant about the *source* of his emotion, then there is no great difficulty. This kind of thing happens all the time, and is certainly part of it, since ignorant lovers do not recognise the transcendent source of the beauty of which they have fallen under the spell. But there is more: their delight at beauty is not mistaken, since they do see beauty. Their mistake is to conclude that beauty is intrinsic to the other person, rather than extrinsic, just as the cold person might make the mistake of thinking that the warmth of the room belonged to the room itself.

This is a mistake of quite another order. It provides an interesting example of the connection between emotion and belief, since belief is essential to passion. Believing that the beauty of one's beloved could be found elsewhere in a more intense, in a *better* form, will surely affect the delight of the lover: render it conditional, tentative or reserved. Certain assumptions and beliefs about the nature of the other are always an integral part of one's emotional response to the other. Correcting the intrinsic/extrinsic confusion will affect the passion: a consequence of the lover's ignorance is that his love will diminish when he is enlightened. That is, when the cognitive structure which frames his belief is altered, his love wanes. Recognising his ignorance as ignorance will diminish his ardour. This is the ultimate legacy of the Platonist view of love: human love fades under the impact of the lover's re-education.

The question of what ignorance is in both Plato and Plotinus is extremely interesting. We have already discussed the superiority of

forgetting in Plotinus, and the role of ignorance as providing something like a subconscious. Naturally it is a theme of great importance for a Platonist, and for Plato himself it is like a kind of moral axis. Ignorance and knowledge are what transform a life into bad and good, failure or success. Ignorance produces mistakes, sometimes of great social consequence,[12] and is probably the greatest single social problem. Ignorance of what is right is said to be wickedness itself.[13] There is a crucial philosophical problem dealt with in the *Theaetetus*, where the famous image of the aviary is put forward, the suggestion being that the mind is full of birds of different types, all objects of knowledge, all waiting to be selected as the objects of thought. Are these objects of ignorance also flying around within the aviary, waiting for attention?

The image of the aviary follows an attempt to deal with knowledge (and the memory) through another image, that of the wax tablet. In the wax tablet image, knowledge is seen as being like the imprint: the aviary provides a different alternative, as if the objects of knowledge have been collected and held (still alive) in another place, available for selection. The objects of knowledge are easy enough to deal with, but it is when the possibility of birds which are objects of ignorance is raised,[14] that there are difficulties. It is not so hard for Cornford to solve the problem, as he chooses to translate *agnoein* as 'not to recognise'.[15] On this view, the mind simply fails to recognise the objects it has stored up, and ignorance is easily explained as 'false belief'. And we have seen earlier that Plotinus rejects the wax tablet model for memory.

But Plato seems to want a symmetry between knowledge and ignorance, as if they both have objects appropriate to them: 'the hunter will sometimes catch hold of knowledge and sometimes of ignorance of the same thing'.[16] One might have thought that ignorance was like having *nothing* in one's mind, and that like blindness, it was nothing more than a failure to see. But this is not how Plato represents it: rather, there are true and false birds, the objects of knowledge and ignorance, respectively.

[12] See *Rep*. 546d1, for example; or *Rep*. 405c4. [13] *Theaet*. 176c5. [14] *Theaet*. 199e.
[15] F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, Kegan Paul, 1935), p. 136 ff.
[16] *Theaet*. 199e.

There is always a tendency in Plato to look for objects of epistemic states, and one should be careful not to overlook the fact that ignorance too has its objects, surprising though this may be for the modern perception of the issue. Different faculties are related to different objects, indeed are defined by their objects, and an example of this is clearly set out in *Republic* 478c3: the object of knowledge is said to be what is, and the object of ignorance to be what is not. This issue of ignorance and its objects seems to puzzle commentators:[17] most would sooner see ignorance as a mental failing without ontological correlates – a failing in the ordinarily well-working process of knowledge. Yet Plato persists in his desire to find ontological correlates and to treat ignorance as every bit as much a mental capacity as knowledge. Ignorance is a state (*pathema*) of the soul, and this state is mirrored in the language which expresses it.[18]

Jean Pépin has established the importance of the *First Alcibiades* as a hermeneutic key both for the study of Plato, and Platonism in general. The discussion of ignorance in this dialogue does much to bring together the fragments alluded to above, in that a connection is made between self-knowledge, and knowledge itself. Ignorance, it is said, is focussing on the 'godless and dark';[19] exactly as it appears in the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*, ignorance is seen as a capacity for focussing on non-things, on the shadowy and insubstantial. In an exactly parallel fashion, knowledge focusses on the forms, and has an uplifting and transforming effect.

In both cases, knowledge of the self is involved: when one looks upon the divine, one knows both 'oneself and one's good'.[20] A shift is made here: focussing on an external produces knowledge of the inner self. The objects of knowledge produce self-knowledge and the objects of ignorance, the 'dark and godless' things, produce self-ignorance.

This is very much the transitional passage for understanding Plotinus' ignorance: again, in Plotinus ignorance has to have an object. That is why the One cannot be ignorant, since there is no other, of

[17] See I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London, Routledge, 1962), vol. II, p. 64: 'For on this view the sphere of competence of *agnoia* will have to be that which is unreal. But we surely cannot say that there is a mental function or state whose sphere of competence is the unreal'. But that is what it looks like.

[18] *Rep*. 382b8. [19] *Alcibiades 1*, 134e4. [20] *Alcibiades I*, 134d.

which the One can be ignorant.[21] Seeming to debate Plato's question, Plotinus asks whether ignorance is caused by matter: some appear to allege that this is not the case.[22] There must have been a discussion here about what causes the *pathema* called ignorance, and the ontological objects must have been said to be its source, that is, false or hollow objects. The answer given by Plotinus is contrary to this, the suggestion being that ignorance is linked to wrong desires.

Carrying on the tradition of the *First Alcibiades*, knowledge is seen as belonging to oneself, and ignorance as going over to another nature. 'Since we ourselves are beautiful in belonging to ourselves, but ugly when we go over to another nature: when we know ourselves we are beautiful, but ugly when we are ignorant of ourselves.'[23] There is a paradox here, to which Plotinus refers, and it is the one left over from the *First Alcibiades* passage, namely, that beauty comes to us from outside, yet is part of our real nature. We are ourselves by this outside agency, because it gives us what we are in truth. The apparently external can bring self-harmony: Aphrodite's beauty may come from herself, but the soul is 'more beautiful when it looks to that which is above it'.[24] Some beings must turn to outside sources for self-enhancement.

Knowledge and self-knowledge therefore intersect because knowing is truly being oneself. Consequently, ignorance is loss of self (with one important exception dealt with below).[25] Ignorance is generally focussing on the external, or the exterior, with consequent loss of

[21] *Enn*. VI.9(9)6, 44, 48. [22] *Enn*. I.8(51)8, 2.
[23] *Enn*. V.8(31)13, 20. [24] *Enn*. V.8(31)13, 15.
[25] An interesting anticipation of the later Platonist use of ignorance ('hyperignorance' in Proclus and Damascius) may be found in *Enn*. VI.9(8)7, 18–20. See my *From Word to Silence*, vol. ii, pp. 126 and 97–118. Throughout this passage Armstrong translates *agnoein* by 'ignore', and one can see why. The passage is so much at variance with other Plotinian uses of the word. The soul, in order to know the One, must 'unknow' (or 'ignore' as in Armstrong) all things. It must also 'unknow' or 'be ignorant of' itself in order to contemplate the One. This is said because Plotinus is in the process of saying that the soul must be empty of any impressions, or forms of them in the Aristotelian sense, in order to know the One. In this passage the emptiness of the soul, a state of readiness for supreme knowledge, is aligned with 'ignorance', and this is one of the earliest occasions in which ignorance is regarded as an advanced state. In general, however, Plotinus is more Platonic in his treatment of ignorance, regarding it as decay-inducing apprehension of the insubstantial. See Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 248, who also translates as 'ignore'.

inwardness.[26] Aspiring to greatness by focussing on greatness is an example of such ignorance, as the true path lies in focussing on oneself: we discuss in subsequent chapters the role of 'one's own', and of having as the key to real being.

Ignorance in Plotinus is a strong development of the line taken by Plato: human beings are said to be like children who have been taken from their parents at birth. They do not know who their parents are, or even who they are themselves.[27] This accounts for their ignorant behaviour, and their tendency to engage in misdirected activities. It is the cave-dwellers of Plato's allegory, combined with the idea of ignorance and forgetting which we saw in the *Phaedrus*, which go together to make up the basic portrait of the human being in Plotinus. The sphere of ignorance is compared to the idea of the subconscious in Chapter 2, and lies outside memory and consciousness.

Augustine recalls that on arriving in Carthage[28] he was attracted by loves of various sorts, and that he was in fact intoxicated with loving itself, without knowing the real object of his love. Plotinus may well be the source of this idea:

> The soul has its love, and is always searching and wishing to be borne away to the Good, even if it does not know that it has this love.[29]

The world is a stage, says Plotinus, where every person plays out a role. It is not entirely clear that Plotinus anticipates Shakespeare here, as he anticipated Augustine above, but it looks astonishingly close to being the case that these ideas entered a tradition which may have influenced both:

> All these murders, deaths, conquests and pillagings of cities, should he considered as if on the stage of a theatre all the changes of scene, the changes of costume, the renditions of sorrow and lament.[30]

It is only the external man, not the soul, which is the player in this entire spectacle, and which plays this out 'on the stage of the whole world'. There is a clear allusion to the theatre of life, and a play on words involving 'to play' (*paizein*) and 'toy' (*paignion*): man is a player on the stage and also a plaything, a mere toy (the external man, that is). As well as meaning 'play' in the game sense, *paizein* may

[26] *Enn.* V1.6(34)1, 14. [27] *Enn.* V.1(10)1, 8. [28] *Conf.* II.2.
[29] *Enn.* VI.7(38)31, 19. [30] *Enn.* III.2(47)15, 43 ff.

refer to playing in an artistic performance; and as well as meaning 'toy', *paignion* may mean a light, inconsequential, work of art. The player on stage is himself a mere conceit, a creation of not much substance. In Plotinus' world stage, the players are ignorant of the fact that they are merely players. They play their parts with deadly seriousness because they are unaware that they are merely players: or in another use of the word-play, Plotinus says 'they take their toys seriously, because they do not know that they are themselves toys'.[31]

Thus, it is not just the lover who is ignorant of the nature of his emotion. The whole human race is a breed of orphans, ignorant of its parentage and true source. Ignorance of the object of love is but one thing, and this is the meaning of Plotinus' correction of Plato's text about the delight of the demiurge, who is made to turn his delight away from the whole world.

The lover may well be ignorant of the passion which carries him along, but 'even the man who weeps . . . does not know that he is at play'.[32]

[31] *Enn.* III.2(47)15, 55. [32] *Enn.* III.2(47)15, 52.

CHAPTER 4

Plotinus' Eros

The student of a tradition always looks for the little changes (the apparently little ones) in order to discover the major areas of innovation and development in that tradition. It is often in the hidden changes that one finds the most significance, since these may point to a moment of great significance: the suppressed moment of crucial innovation. Those who do their work within a tradition in antiquity tend to want to minimise the differences between their own thought and the traditional position: it is preferable to force the meaning of a passage than to admit some departure from orthodoxy. Traditionalism was favoured in antiquity, whilst apparent innovation is favoured in the contemporary era.

With the exegesis by Plotinus of Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, we have a perfect example of interpretation which is forced, in order to preserve the appearance of traditionalism. Plotinus finds himself having to deal with a story which has the form of an allegory of the lover, but he comes to it with an already well-developed philosophical system. Other writings, such as *On Beauty* (*Enn*. I.6) for example, put on display the rigorous character of his thoughts on beauty, and on how it can be apprehended. As a Platonist, Plotinus must find inspiration in this little love story, or rather this phenomenology of the lover, but in his capacity as an original thinker, Plotinus cannot always adapt to what had become the text of tradition. We will consider these differences and their significance.

SEEING, RATHER THAN LOVING

The dominant theme of Plotinus' epistemology is that the highest form of knowledge, that of the One, is closer to an act of seeing than to

an act of reasoning. An overall understanding of Plotinus' writings is necessary if one is to appreciate fully his way of approaching questions of being and knowledge and without such a perspective it is virtually impossible to deal with *Ennead* III.5(50), on Plato's *eros*. It is better to read I.6(1), on beauty, in order to appreciate the real Plotinus, before reading his interpretation of the *Symposium*.

'Love is found above all in seeing.'[1] The passage which follows discusses harmony and balance. It refers to those elements in a physical body which, taken together, create an impression of physical beauty. These observations, together with the discussion of proportion in relation to beauty, are traditional. But there follows a discussion of the way in which the soul adapts to beauty, as if made for it:

> The soul speaks of it as if it understood it and knew it, welcoming it and as it were harmonising itself with it. But when it encounters ugliness it shrinks back and rejects it, and turns away from it: it is out of tune with it, and alienated from it. Our explanation is that the soul . . . rejoices when it sees something akin to itself, or a trace of this.[2]

Now, seeing has become a metaphor for the perception of the soul. Plotinus is following at this point a parallelism between the sensible and the transcendent worlds which is familiar from Plato, since the beauty of the physical world (and its apprehension) finds a precisely reflected image in the spiritual world. In this sense at least, Plotinus follows the anagogy of the physical world in respect of the higher world, exactly as does Plato.

But there is a new element. This sense of the familiar, that the soul and beauty recognise each other instantly and that they are virtually made for each other, is rather removed from Plato. Of course, one can point to doctrines of Plato which touch on the reminiscence of the soul (one can recall the *Phaedrus*, with its theme of the winged chariot and the celestial flight of the soul), but there is still something new here.

Plotinus writes of a harmony between the soul and beauty which fits them to each other, adapts them to each other and makes them familiar, made for each other. This idea stipulates a kind of natural and functional relationship between the soul and the beautiful. This is

[1] *Enn.* I.6(1)1, 1. [2] *Enn.* I.6(1)2, 3.

not a fixed or solidified relationship, but it is an available relationship and can operate in a natural way, without being forced and without any fissure in the texture of the real. The cooperation between soul and beauty is therefore a kind of disposition, a disposition towards union.

Between Plato and Plotinus lies Aristotle, and we can discern his influence in the construction of this relationship between the soul and the real. But it is perhaps easier to develop the distinction between Plato and Plotinus by drawing the picture through another author, Heidegger, himself directly indebted to Aristotle. For Heidegger, the world of the real is not alien: it is as if fitted to us, and we discover ourselves to be in a familiar world. This intimacy within which we live, in relation to surrounding things, is described by Heidegger as the *Handlichkeit* of reality. What exists is 'to hand', capable of being handled, and taken in hand. This simple metaphor comes from Aristotle, and in order to develop it Heidegger takes the example of the hammer. The handle of a hammer is shaped according to the task, with curves placed where necessary, precisely because the hammer is to be used in the hand, and by the hand. Reality has this same characteristic of being apparently for us and for our use: we are able to enjoy its familiarity. The metaphor of the hand is used over and over by Heidegger as one of his main themes: other terms used in association with it are *Zuhandenheit* and *vorhandene*. Everything is to hand, capable of being handled.

Elsewhere I have claimed that this set of ideas forms part of Heidegger's attempt to minimise difference and to promote identity or familiarity in the real. This quality of being ready to hand, in Heidegger's vernacular, signals to us that we should not emphasise the quality of difference (*diaphora*) in being but rather that of identity (*tautotes*). It is Aristotle who inspires this entire line of thought, and he is the source of Heidegger's image of the hand as the symbol of the relationship between the soul and the world of reality.[3] In discussing the identity of the soul and its objects, Aristotle himself uses the image of the hand, in this case a hand which takes up a stone, and here Aristotle finds an image which casts light on the question of the relationship between soul and its objects. It is not my intention

[3] *On the Soul* 432a1 ff.

to deal with the text of Aristotle here, even though it is, of course, very important for the transition from Plato to Plotinus. I am simply taking Heidegger's hand, so to speak, since he took Aristotle's hand, in order to clarify a specific element in Plotinus' thought.

The Aristotelian theme which lies behind the passage of Plotinus is the identity of the intelligence and the intelligible objects. Plotinus reads Plato with the benefit of the Aristotelian discussion: and without bothering with the detail, we can see in Plotinus the influence of this intimacy between the soul and beautiful things. Returning to the interpretation of the *Symposium*, it is therefore no longer surprising to find in Plotinus this sense of the complicity between the lover and the beautiful itself. In Plato the quest for beauty has much more tension and difficulty about it, whereas that of Plotinus seems much calmer and more natural: everything is in hand, one might say. The vision of beauty in Plotinus seems much more natural and is carried out without stretching the natural order of things. One could almost conclude that Plotinus envisages an element of necessity, *anagke*, in his seeing process.

In fact, Plotinus takes up the allegory of the *Symposium* with an already rigidly formed philosophy, and one which is much more systematic than that of his master. Armstrong notes more than once in the notes of his Loeb edition that Plotinus does not take myths very seriously, even when he is undertaking their exegesis. I am including here under the term 'myth' both Plato's allegory and the various mythical elements from which Plato draws his story: in fact Plotinus gives his point of view on the interpretation of myth in III.5(50)9, 24, where it is said that myth separates things in time and lays out in their separate elements things which are normally understood together; in the end the interpreter has to bring them all together through the understanding process. And as Hadot says, in the commentary of *Traité 50* (246), in this context all discourse is to some extent mythical.

Plotinus is not, however, an enthusiastic mythographer: Armstrong points out errors in his accounts, and one is also aware of what is virtually an element of impatience on the part of the author when he is obliged, as a good Platonist, to raise a detail of the myth in order to interpret it. Plotinus is much more at ease when he is the narrator, but the narrator of his own natural philosophy. This constitutes yet

another reason for thinking that it is his own philosophy which constitutes the greatest barrier for Plotinus in his quest to be nothing more than a mere disciple in the school of Plato.

Some passages from III.6 may serve to demonstrate the importance of seeing, and the natural character of seeing, or indeed loving. First, in respect of the creative work of nature:

> For, nature when it creates looks toward beauty, and it looks toward the definite, which is the column of the good.[4]

Then there are the texts which put on display Plotinus' handling of Plato's myth:

> Love who has come into existence as a reality is always ordered towards something else beautiful . . . , the eye of the desiring, which through its power gives to the lover the sight of the object desired.[5]

There is here introduced an image which is Plotinus' own, and which is superimposed on the imagery of Plato: love as an eye. This is a metaphor which is much less dynamic than those chosen by Plato, and indeed seems to have little to do with the human phenomenology of the erotic as tends to be observed by Plato, unless it is related to the phenomenology of voyeurism. Of course, love is clearly distinguished from the lover, as in Plato: it is a kind of universal spirit with an identifiable role, but in the case of Plotinus the role of *eros* is to give sight to the lover, exactly as if one were giving an eye to a blind person.

But this *eros* is well ahead of the lover, so far ahead that one wonders if one is dealing with two entirely different things. Eros is almost a higher spirit:

> But love himself runs on ahead and before he gives the lover the power of seeing through the optic organ, he fills himself with gazing, seeing before the lover but certainly not in the same way, since he installs the vision in the lover, plucking from the vision of the beautiful as it speeds past.[6]

[4] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 20: See P. Hadot, *Plotin, Traité 50* (Paris, Les editions du Cerf, 1990), p. 100. For 'definite', 'reçu une mesure': the reference is to a Pythagorean table.

[5] *Enn.* III.5(50)2, 37.

[6] *Enn.* III.5(50)2, 41, trans. Armstrong. Note a very different translation by Hadot of the last four words: 'lorsque celle-çi l'effleure'.

It is true that in this passage there is an intermediary element, the *metaxu*, which takes up an important part of the discussion of Plotinus. But his *metaxu* is not at all of this kind, and it seems that Plato is attempting, through his use of this term, to describe a certain state of the individual, caught between desire and satisfaction. If there are terms which suggest the personification of the *metaxu*, or intermediary, then this is precisely because Plato intends to dramatise the situation of the individual.

But Plotinus removes the *metaxu* from the individual, creating a kind of agency which procures the vision of the beautiful, satisfies itself with it and then installs this vision in the lover, exactly as one might install a programme in a computer. Given this shift carried out by the Neoplatonic disciple, some questions suggest themselves. Why did Plotinus find it necessary to separate and define the powers of his *eros* in this manner? The answer lies in the very definition of love, which in Plotinus is much closer to contemplation than it is in Plato. Of course, the quest of the lover in the *Symposium* ends with the vision of the 'vast ocean of the beautiful', but in Plotinus loving is seeing, right from the outset. Since we are made for the vision of the beautiful, and since we are capable of it, and since it is natural to dedicate ourselves to this contemplation, Plotinus is forced to separate two phases of *eros*: the state of being unsatisfied and the process of seeing become two distinct functions. Here, love becomes contemplation, continuous and fulfilled, and the unfortunate state of the lover is something entirely different:

> Love came to be as an eye filled with its vision, like a seeing that has its image with it; and I suppose his name most likely came to him from this, because he derives his real existence from seeing.[7]

In this way, using an etymology which links vision (*horasis*) and love (*eros*), Plotinus establishes a conceptual link between the two: love is the eye of the lover's soul. A double or parallel structure is envisaged with a heavenly love for the higher soul, which 'exists only there, where pure soul exists'.[8] Each soul, whether higher or lower, has an eye, an instrument of contemplation, which is none other than *eros* itself.

[7] *Enn.* III.5(50)3, 13, trans. Armstrong. [8] *Enn.* III.5(50)3, 27.

It is important to note a sort of qualification which arises out of a deployment of the *via negativa*; although Plotinus compares love to a seeing eye, he annuls the image to a certain extent by insisting that in this kind of vision, the image is already present. We may recall Plato's *Theaetetus*, in which a certain science of vision says that light flows out of the eye towards the object, which itself emits images; the meeting of the two creates a kind of fusion, which produces a new being within consciousness and memory. It follows that the metaphor of vision is particularly well suited to the activity of contemplation. This kind of idea is already quite apt but in case there is doubt he insists that this vision is a way of seeing that 'which already has the image in itself'.[9] There is now no distinction between seeing and its object.

Taking up these themes we find two ways in which Plotinus differentiates himself from Plato. In the first place, the connection between the lover and the beautiful is much more natural in the Neoplatonist: it is well established in the architecture of the real, so that the unfolding of love proceeds exactly according to Plotinus' laws of metaphysics. Secondly, he maintains a separation between desire and love and this tends to create two separate principles, whereas with Plato there is only one. The split introduced by Plotinus produces a spirit, love, which is contemplation itself and is therefore fully satisfied; and another, desire, which has scarcely any role since unsatisfaction is not part of Plotinus' ontological model.

ABSENCE OF PROCREATION IN PLOTINUS

We return to the sexual metaphor which is at the heart of Plato's discussion of the love of the beautiful. In Plato, it is the human *eros* which predominates in the final version of the way to the knowledge of the beautiful. The portrait of *eros*, born in poverty but rich in strategy, hard, rootless, anxious, always in pursuit of something, is extremely striking: from there Plato moves to pregnancy and to the tendency of the couple to develop a preoccupation with the production of another element, the child, which goes beyond them. Physical love is left behind in the pursuit of the transcendent, but in the end

[9] *Enn.* III.5(50)3, 3.

the conclusion must be drawn that for Plato the image of *eros* is more than a metaphor; it is an analogy, *analogia entis*, to borrow from scholastic definitions, of the passage from the physical to the transcendent. For Plato, sexual desire and the aspiration towards the transcendent resemble each other very closely since they are based on similar realities.

It does not seem to be the same for Plotinus who, as we know, was ashamed of being in the flesh according to Porphyry in the biography. Plotinus was not alone in rejecting the flesh: as is well known, this attitude was rather common in late antiquity. It is this environment which gives birth to Christian celibacy.

We will now take another small detour, as with Heidegger, but with Peter Brown and his well-known work, *The Body and Society*. Plotinus can help us with certain questions raised in this book. Brown raises the question of the cult of virginity in late antiquity, and of the female rejection of sexual relations. He stresses that the body was used as a symbol of resistance against social pressure, coming from family, empire and men: after so many years of war and so much death, it is the State, on this point of view, which imposes on the woman the obligation to bear children. This was a social pressure of the functional kind, which encountered resistance in the form of a new ethic, namely, that of female celibacy. The cult of virginity was nothing other than a challenge to the demands of an overly oppressive and demanding state. Without discussing this thesis in detail, it can be noted here that the ideas of Plotinus are very important for all these questions. In Peter Brown's case two questions push themselves forward: first, is the ethic of celibacy universal, crossing the cultural divisions between Christian and pagan, for example?; and secondly, is masculine celibacy satisfactorily explained in the terms proposed by Brown?

The example of Plotinus is useful in this connection, since he led a life which supposedly provided an example of this rejection of sensuality and the licentious life, and even of any sexual relations. He was, obviously enough, a pagan rather than a Christian, but shared the same sexual ideology. He was, even more obviously, a man, for whom the arguments about the rejection of procreation count for little. Peter Brown's hypothesis excludes too much. It may work for

women, but the male rejection of the body remains there to be explained.

In addition to Porphyry's well-known remark, the treatise on love provides an excellent perspective on Plotinus' view of the body, since it is here that he must face up to the sexual phenomenology advanced by Plato. It is of course clear that Plato takes very seriously the human experience of desire and that this is in no way a flippantly chosen metaphor: it is an *analogia entis*, an analogy of the real, which provides us with a genuine path to being. First, we may examine the following text of Plotinus:

> And if they come from this beauty here to the recollection of that archetype, this earthly beauty still satisfies them as an image; but if they do not recollect, then, because they do not know what is happening to them, they fancy this is the true beauty. If they remain chaste there is no error in their intimacy with the beauty here below, but it is error to fall away into sexual intercourse.[10]

This last remark would not be found in Plato. It was Ficino, not Plato, who invented 'Platonic love'. No doubt Plato would have considered sexual relations to be some sort of error, but of an intellectual kind rather than moral, and a somewhat banal error at that. Love on the human level is considered to arise from an obsession with image rather than reality. Plotinus distinguishes between this preoccupation with image, and the process of following up the obsession through the sexual act, which he singles out for special condemnation. It is in this distinction that one sees clearly the difference between the two authors: Plato would of course condemn obsession with images, but between that and sexual relations there would be nothing much to dwell on. Sex would be an intellectual error, but it would not be a question of two errors.

The chastity of Plotinus comes out in this passage, but his remarks on procreation are more interesting and they confirm, strangely enough from the pen of a man, Peter Brown's thesis on the female revolt against procreation. Let us go back for a moment to his book:

[10] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 34.

> The pressure on young women was inexorable. For the population of the Roman Empire to remain even stationary, it appears that each woman would have had to produce an average of five children. Young girls were recruited early for their task. The median age of Roman girls at marriage may have been as low as fourteen.[11]

The rejection of procreation, in Brown's view, is based on these facts of the demography of women and their revolt against living under these conditions. And Plotinus comes forward to support their position.

Clearly, Plato attributes great importance to the procreation stage in his love story. In the end, the lovers turn to the creation of something supplementary, and in Plato's interpretation this impulse towards augmentation leads to the creation of great works, whether in the field of art, thought or civic contribution. But Plotinus has enormous difficulty with the idea of procreation, and struggles with the obligation to adhere to this element of the Platonic tradition.

Plotinus refuses to carry the procreation idea through to its logical conclusion. Whereas Plato presents a lover who in the end wants to produce something, and whereas he makes this an essential feature of his *eros*, Plotinus cannot pursue this idea to its natural end. There exists, he says, a kind of 'mixed desire', through which a human being might well seek to procreate: in this way the lover 'sows for eternity and sows in beauty', because of the relationship between eternity and the beautiful.[12] Further on, however, more is said:

> That which does not want to procreate is more complete in beauty; that which desires to create wants to make something beautiful in virtue of lack and of a failure in self-sufficiency.[13]

There is a new idea here, at least in the context of the exegesis of the *Symposium*: *autarkeia*, or 'self-sufficiency'. This term is a rich one and it immediately throws light on the cult of celibacy discussed by Peter Brown. It is clear that a whole series of ideas underlies the notion of *autarkeia* – the idea of fullness, that of self-sufficiency and also that of purity of substance. Unity is higher than mixture,

[11] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 6.
[12] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 43. [13] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 6.

and *mixis*, or sexual union, is merely a dissipation towards mixture, the abandonment of self-sufficiency and unity. Genuine existence involves turning oneself inwards and remaining within oneself. For Plotinus, there is a major gulf between the interior and the exterior: the external way leads towards objects and activities, otherness in general, with the consequent loss of unity and integrity. In this way Plotinus is completely in harmony with his period, providing a solid comment on certain social developments which we have discussed. It may also be noted that his remarks on self-sufficiency are as valid for the male who participates in it, as for the female. Whereas for Brown the structural and functional arguments deal only with the female reaction against pressure to procreate, Plotinus reaches a formulation which embraces the whole human phenomenon in late antiquity of the rejection of life in couples, and of sexual experience.

The lovers of the *Symposium* go the whole way to procreation, and they experience the transformation of their preoccupation with each other into a positive project which leads to the existence of a *tertium quid*, a supplementary being. In Plato's thinking, this supplement can develop into a social or civic contribution: whatever results from this process of procreation, which itself is the result of *eros*, is in any case something good.

But for Plotinus, procreation signals a sense of lack, and represents a failure in self-sufficiency. He or she who does not want to beget shows more self-sufficiency 'in beauty': Plotinus' position is very clear.[14] In Plato one *loves* as a result of a lack (*endeia*) of something, but in Plotinus one *procreates* out of the same lack. The lack has been pushed down the chain to another stage. This break in the allegory as laid out by Plato cuts in two the story as it develops, leaving practically no room for a relationship between two people, or between one and the other. Plotinus can nevertheless account for pregnancy, as is necessary for a disciple of Plato: he says that through a kind of error, the person who begets something apparently beautiful can imagine that he is self-sufficient.[15] More remarkably, he who loves a beautiful woman merely because she is beautiful, is superior to the man who loves her out of a desire to perpetuate himself – remarkable

[14] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 46. [15] *Enn.* III.5(50)1, 49.

in the sense that this position represents a complete overturning of an important part of Plato's anagogy. Love without issue, for Plotinus, is a higher form than love which is fruitful and yields something.

This *aphairesis*, or abstraction of Plato's idea of procreation, carried out by Plotinus shows also a kind of suspicion of *praxis*, not at all present in Plato. Plotinus is less attentive to *eros* as a constitutive force in the social and moral sphere than is Plato. The author of the *Republic* is more conscious of the productive role of the person who is at once good, and a lover; the social conscience which characterises Plato is remarkable by its absence in Plotinus.

Earlier, the importance of vision in Plotinus was noted (vision rather than love), and a comparison with the Heideggerian idea that reality is to hand, and can be handled, was developed. Reality is equally available to Plotinus too: it is there because it must be there, and the human being is shaped according to the contours of this universe. Further, there is little difference between the fact of being loved and love itself:

> And he, that same self [the One] is lovable, and is love and is love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself . . . Desiring is one with the object of desire . . . desire and the substance [sc. the object of desire] are the same.[16]

Love is not the state of lack which we find in Plato, but a kind of plenitude and perfect harmony which resembles vision, a kind of vision which knows no distinction between seeing and its object. In fact, as I have suggested elsewhere,[17] the lack identified by Plotinus in III.5 is that of matter, not of love. Matter is the mother of love.[18]

Plotinus' exegesis of Plato's *eros* is no more than a collection of texts and symbols which together create the appearance of 'Platonism'. In fact, Plotinus' metaphysic does not allow this kind of Platonism. Procreation and production lead downwards, and cannot play a role in the ascent as Plato had envisaged. Love must be separated from any suggestion of lack or insufficiency since these states belong to matter

[16] *Enn.* VI.8(39)15, 1.
[17] Raoul Mortley, *Désir et différence dans la tradition platonicienne* (Paris, Vrin, 1988), p. 40.
[18] *Enn.* III.5(50)9, 48.

and darkness, the abode of difference itself. Love is found only where there exists a perfect unity between loved object and love, between contemplation and its objects.

Plotinus' exegesis of Plato's *eros* is a kind of disguise, a front for major innovation.

CHAPTER 5

The self: 'and we too are kings'

These words,[1] which are found at the beginning of V.3(49)4 of the *Enneads*, concern the self and the knowledge of the self. They are found in the course of a discussion on the idea of 'ours', of what belongs to us, of what is part of us. They should be read in conjunction with another well-known passage on the self (*Enn*. VI.4(22)14, 17) which asks the question: who are we, *tines de hemeis*?

What is ours? This appears to be a very important question in Plotinus, and we will investigate it here and in following chapters, particularly 'Being and Having'. There can be things which are in us, or which we possess, or which belong to us: these things are ours. But what is ours can also be part of a relationship, or even of a vague or ill-defined connection: my friends, my ideas, my habits. This is the question put by Plotinus in V.3(49)3, 20 ff.: first, the question of what is ours, *to hemeteron*; and secondly, the most important question of all: is Intellect 'ours'? Plotinus is investigating the question through a two-pronged series of discussions, dealing on the one hand with what is ours, what is possession, what is the relationship between the self and its contextual environment, and on the other with the supreme principle, the Intellect, and its connection with the beings which lie beneath it. Bertrand Ham,[2] in his highly scholarly commentary, refers to the background in Plato's *First Alcibiades*, which we have discussed in Chapter 7, and rightly dwells on the differentiation between 'us'

This chapter is a substantially revised version of an article which first appeared in French, in (1999) *Kairos* 15: 151–60.

[1] Literally 'we too reign'.

[2] In *Plotin, Traités* 49 (Présentations et traductions par Matthieu Guyot, Thomas Vidart, Richard Dufour, Francesco Fronterotta et Jean-Marie Flamand, 2009), vol. 8, p. 16.

and 'ours', which is developed in the Socratic discussion.[3] The passage involves analysis of the idea of use, with the familiar Platonic analogy of the craftsman as a user of his tools: so it might be with the body, simply being used by the soul or the self, whatever it is:

SOCRATES. So man is different from his own body?
ALCIBIADES. So it seems.
SOCRATES. What then is man?[4]

There appears to be here the basis for a distinction between the true self (perhaps the soul, or intellect in Plato) and what is attached to it in the way of appendages, including physical appendages, between what we are and what is ours. Our view, enunciated throughout this book, is that Plotinus does not separate 'us', or the essence of the self, and 'ours'. He treats it as a whole. In this sense Plotinus corrects the Platonic tradition, as he is wedded to the idea of reality lying within what belongs to us (see the closing words of this book). Plotinus salvages the whole person, body and higher self: in his treatment 'ours' is an extension of 'us'.

The passage of Plotinus goes somewhat like this: discursive reason (*to dianoetikon*) does not turn towards itself (V.3(49)2, 23). It rather receives imprints from an external source. Discursive reason will make an image of Socrates on the basis of the external impression it has received. Thus, it functions on the basis of that which comes to it from outside; but if one puts to it the question of whether this Socrates, whose image we now see represented, is good, it can also respond to such an evaluative inquiry. In fact, since *dianoia* possesses within itself the 'norm of goodness', it can reply to such a question and make a judgement about it. How then does *dianoia* come to possess this innate capacity, which is apparently internalised? Does it have an essence of its own, independent of external accidents? Goodness exists in the *dianoia* because the latter has the form of the Good, and is assisted by Intellect. Intellect (*nous*) can examine that which is proper to it, but reasoning deals with that which is external: properly reflexive activity is characteristic of Intellect (*nous*), and not of reasoning (*dianoia*). Only Intellect can play this reflexive role. Can

[3] *Alcibiades I*, 129–30. [4] *Alcibiades I*, 129e.

Intellect be located in the soul? Yes and no. The answer given to this question in lines V.3(49)3, 26 ff. is equivocal: 'In truth it is ours without being ours . . . '.

That is, we use discursive reason unceasingly, but Intellect only intermittently. We are not Intellect, but we are 'in accord with it', in the higher part of discursive reason. Every act of intelligence comes from above, whereas sensations come from below; our souls are therefore in some way intermediary between these two principles, between sensation which is below, and Intellect itself, which is above. We incline towards Intellect, which does not incline itself towards us.

We have in ourselves, according to Plotinus, something which is 'according' to this reflexive power, but is nevertheless not 'ours'. How may we define this notion of a capacity which we have, but which we do not possess? It is not at all clear; first, we are told that we reason 'according to Intellect', secondly, that we use it, and then that it is perhaps 'ours', or perhaps not. It must be noted that 'ours' is a wide and difficult concept, which comes to us with a very specific meaning derived from the unity of the self as we have understood it in the West for some time, ranging from physical ownership to abstract legal ideas of ownership and entitlement. And the reticence of Plotinus, who does not wish to take a clear line on this term 'ours' in respect of the relationship between the Intelligence and the soul, matches exactly the dimensions of the problem of the self in his writings; is some kind of unity of self an indispensable condition for the possessive pronoun to be used?[5]

Further, Plotinus adds the following difficulty, in that he notes that Intelligence is separated:

> because it is separated: separated in the sense that it does not incline towards us, but it is rather we who incline towards it when we look above.[6]

[5] Bertrand Ham, *Plotin, Traité 49* (Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2000), pp. 116–17, distinguishes four types of self in Plotinus, and schematically identifies 'ours' with sensation, the 'we' with discursive reason and the 'ours and not ours' with Intellect. We are not entirely comfortable with an overly schematic approach to these definitions since in our view there is continuity between 'ours', 'us', 'one's own' (see Chapter 6), and Intellect.

[6] *Enn*. V.3(49)3, 42.

And to complicate the question of what is 'ours' he closes by saying: 'Intellect is our king'. Before examining the sources of these terms, in Plato and Aristotle, something which could otherwise slip through unnoticed should be pointed out: in introducing the image of the king, Plotinus chooses in addition to emphasise once more the 'our', since it is our king. Can I possess a king in the same way that I possess a hand? Yes and no, Plotinus would say, but at least he has found a formulation which apparently appears suitable to him. One may say that intelligence is ours if that which belongs to us, and is 'ours' in this sense, is understood in the same way as the relationship between us and 'our' king. But even here the equivocation of Plotinus' thought on the issue of 'having' reappears, since he seems to avoid the possessive pronoun through a rather curious turn of phrase: this king, that is the Intelligence, is a king *pros hemas*, king 'for us'. There is nothing to prevent the pronoun *hemeteron* being used, but it is not used either in Plotinus' Greek or in the source text, which is Plato's *Philebus*, where it is simply said that Intellect is the king of heaven and earth.[7] This expression appears to be deliberately inserted by Plotinus, in order to continue to highlight the questions around the term 'ours', and in order to allow him to reserve judgement on the question of the self and the way in which it owns 'its' intelligence. That is, the integrity of the self is the issue at stake.

He could well have written 'a king above us' (*eph' hemas*), or else *en hemin* (among us), since these are regular expressions for the relationship under discussion, but he chooses to say '*pros hemas*'. Do these words mean 'for us', or 'in respect of us'? Or to put the question another way, is it that the king is given *to* us, or is he simply there as a fact of our existence? Plotinus employs this unusual turn of phrase in order to suggest that there is a relationship of belonging, but that this is not a case of common-or-garden possession. The king is ours, but in a different sense of the word 'ours' – not a something we physically hold.[8]

[7] See below.

[8] Denis O'Brien suggests that this wording may reflect a debate being carried on with Origen, in Denis O'Brien, 'Origène et Plotin sur le roi de l'univers' in *Sophies Maietores, Hommage à Jean Pépin* (Paris, Institut des études augustiniennes, 1992), pp. 317, 341.

In any case let us examine the sources. First, the *Philebus* of Plato (28c7–8) introduces the notion of the intellect-king. The discussion here is about the *genos*, and in what classifications should be placed *phronesis*, *episteme* and *nous*. When he raises this question, Socrates is accused of praising his own god: he does not deny it and continues by arguing that: 'Intellect (*nous*) is king of heaven and earth'.

We will return to this text, but it is now necessary to examine the passage of Aristotle on the Intellect which directs everything (*De Anima* 430a18). Here, Aristotle endeavours to advance the logic of the relationship between Intellect and other beings, the question left somewhat open by Plato, who aligned himself, of course, with the tradition emanating from Anaxagoras. Aristotle distinguished between *nous*/Intellect in the passive sense, which becomes all things, and the active Intellect, which is the cause. Intellect in the latter sense is an activity, which behaves, for example, like light, and remains even while within its activity as 'separated, impassive, and un-mixed'. That which acts is always superior to that which undergoes, and the *arche* is always superior to matter.

Intellect thinks incessantly. When it is separated, it is in its most authentic state, and as such is eternal and immortal. Aristotle, drawing an absolute distinction between Intellect and the real, preserves and develops its greatness: its isolation constitutes the guarantee of its active and creative capacity. Now, as if to reply, Plotinus says: 'but we too are kings . . . '.[9]

Thus, he takes up again the question of what is held in common between the thinker and the thought, since thinking is cast as the royal activity. The question is also raised by Aristotle (*De Anima* 429b30). Thus, Plotinus, whilst accepting the Aristotelian separation of the intellect, and whilst allowing a doubt to hover over the relationship of the self and the intellect through his hesitation over the term 'ours', returns to the theme of the 'king for us' in order to set out some qualifications. In fact we are all kings.

[9] *Enn*. V.3(49)4, 1. Literally, 'we too reign'. Ham, *Plotin, Traité 49*, p. 122, finds the transition from noun to verb significant, it should be pointed out; he sees there to be a difference between saying 'we are kings', which implies identity, and 'we reign', which allows some identification but not complete identity.

This expression puts one in mind of Eusebius, who in the course of the development of his Ecclesiastical History, insists that we are all Christs.[10] He is proposing here to raise the human being to a quasi-divine status, in the Arian style. The vision of Eusebius, according to which there emerged a whole series of Christs from the time of Moses, culminating with a church populated with Christs, is beyond the range of this chapter, but since Eusebius derived some of his ideas from the philosophy of Arius, it may not be without relationship to the Plotinian themes under examination. The same question is at stake, that of the value of the human individual.

When Plotinus returns to the image of the king in this way, he is perhaps working from a passage of the *Philebus* a little further on. Having established the comparison between reason and king, somewhat later Socrates begins to discuss the soul of Zeus (30c–d). We are to understand here that Zeus is the human archetype and that his psychic disposition is considered to be typically human:

> So you say that in the nature of Zeus a royal soul is implanted as well as a royal intellect through the power of the cause, and other fine things in other natures according to what they like to hear?

The use of the term 'royal' for the soul as well as the Intellect prepares us exactly for what Plotinus has to say. Plato, although he would prefer to emphasise the superiority and the importance of this seminal reason, nevertheless does not seek to exclude the human soul from its field of existence. The reason for this lies in the preceding discussion, where Socrates says that it is inconceivable that Sophia and Intellect could come into existence without soul. If Zeus can have the soul and the intellect of a king, we too, says Plotinus, can be kings. How can the human soul have this kind of superiority, comparable to that enjoyed by the supreme and separated Intelligence? By conforming itself to this Intellect – and this process can take place either by having its imprint engraved on us, like a law inscribed in our souls, or by being filled by it, feeling and seeing its presence. The presence of the intellect is important, as well as the consciousness of its presence. He who does not feel the presence of what is inevitably there in every act

[10] See Raoul Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History: From Aristotle to Eusebius* (New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 184 ff.

of reasoning does not reach the height evoked by this portrait of the royal self.

We note that the expression 'like laws engraved in us', which explains the state of being *kat' ekeinon*, in conformity with Intelligence, is to be found neither in the text of Plato nor in that of Aristotle. This image is used by Plotinus to suggest the state of internalised intellect, and suggests consideration of the Neopythagorean texts on kingship. These texts, which were studied by Delatte in 1942,[11] were part of an attempt to reason out the phenomenon of kingship and to provide a philosophical justification for it. Greece, though the cradle of democracy, also saw the birth of the new political regime of kingship with the advent of Alexander and the *diadochoi*, the successors of Alexander who became the Hellenistic Greek kings, and of course the Roman Republic also gave way to monarchy. Under these circumstances, and encouraged by the phenomenon of the ruler cult, the philosophers, always pliable, attempted to lay the intellectual foundations of such regimes in order to be able to provide a legitimate place for monarchs within the social order.

A passage of Ecphantus, preserved by Stobaeus (IV.7(2)65), talks of the spontaneous loyalty of the subjects engendered by the qualities of the king. The philosophical construction of Ecphantus depends largely on the Good and its capacity for attraction: this Platonic principle is introduced within a hierarchical schema which situates the king in an intermediate position, drawn towards the Good, with his subjects in turn drawn towards him. There is an emphasis on the idea of imitation, since the king, imitated by the people, himself imitates the Good. Ecphantus attempts to avoid the suggestion that this culture of imitation stems from a lack or a weakness on the part of the individual who conforms in this way. In this political theory, the whole social project turns on the idea of *homoiosis*, a term relatively well known through its later theological use, but which is here limited to the field of political relations. The advantage of this political form, according to Ecphantus, is that the will and benevolence of the citizenry is brought into play without there being any need for punishment or force.

[11] *Les Traités de la Royauté d'Ecphante, Diotogène et Sthénidas* (Paris, Droz, 1942).

Other texts establish a relationship between the king and the internal law, as Plotinus has done here. Archytas speaks of the king as law incarnate (*nomos empsuchos*): the king is not subject to the laws, but he is identical to the law. There is no other criterion than he, since he conforms himself to the law of the Good. In the same way Diotogenes speaks of the incarnate law, and of the fact that the king is a sovereign who is *nomimos* (Stobaeus IV.7(2)61).

These so-called Neopythagorean texts may be known by Plotinus, or he may be absorbing the same thoughts from another source, and the image of the *nomos* inscribed in the soul comes to mind for him because it is the very question of *autarkeia* which is now at stake in his discussion. Having gone over the question of the 'ours', having raised doubts about whether the self possesses intellect in the full sense, Plotinus has reached the stage at which he wishes nevertheless to restate a certain unity and a certain creative power of the self. Now, these Neopythagorean discussions of the just king and of the incarnate law are always found in the context of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), specifically the self-sufficiency of the king. The relationship with God achieved through *homoiosis* constitutes the full realisation of his capacities since he thus becomes more royal, exactly like his subjects who, in imitating him, become more human.

We suggest therefore that Plotinus, having taken up the Platonic metaphor of the intellect-king to reinforce the positive capacity of the self, has now added the image of the *nomos empsuchos*, the incarnate law, because he has in mind these political theories on the role of the king. It is also a fine image, that of the splendid individual furnished with all the autonomy as well as the moral and intellectual capacity of the king himself. We too are kings.

THE AUTONOMY OF THE SELF

Let us now examine the explanation of this striking statement of the royalty of the human soul. For it is here that Plotinus, in spite of his doubts and his questionings, comes closest to the later Western idea of the individuated and unified self.

In the first place, it is striking to note that throughout this passage the notion of imitation, found among Neopythagoreans, is

completely absent. This is of interest because this very simple idea could have provided an easy solution for the problem of the relationship between the soul and the intellect. In its place one finds a very opaque language, namely, that of the preposition: the *kata*. When it is necessary to speak about the state of conformity with, or of a relationship with the *nous*, Plotinus always resorts to phrases such as 'according to the intelligence' (*kata noun*), or 'according to that yonder', and these terms are held to express the relationship. This is a state of being *according* to something. But the brevity of Plotinus' language draws our attention to the fact that there remains a question, and that the nature of the relationship between the soul and Intelligence remains to be spelt out. The term *kata*, 'according to', serves to sum up the problem for the moment and to postpone it to another discussion. One can recognise here a permanent problem of Platonism, and the great difficulty of this passage is typical of a traditional problem: the relationship between the ideal and the lower world is difficult to spell out, Plato himself having varied between different formulations, such as copy/model, cause/effect, participation, and so on. The logic of these problems forms the subject matter of the dialogue, the *Parmenides*.

Here, Plotinus resists spelling out his view, sometimes hiding behind the *kata*, or else choosing a series of images. We have examined the image of the *nomos* engraved in the soul, or the idea of being filled by the intellect. It is now, at V.3(49)4, 9 and following, that Plotinus throws another idea into the discussion: it is possible to *become* intellect. Thus, he who knows himself is two-fold: one knows the nature of the soul's discursive reason, and the other goes beyond this one, knowing himself according to (*kata*) Intellect and becoming this Intellect; in this Intellect he thinks himself again, no longer as man: 'He is no longer man because he has become entirely other'.[12]

There are two persons involved, one being superior to the other, as is indicated by the *toutou* of line 9. It is not so much a question of two modes of knowledge, but of two persons. It is important to make this point because it makes clear the continuity of the theme of the self throughout this passage of Plotinus; he moves from 'ours', that which the self may 'possess', to the image of the king, used first in relation to Intellect, and finally in relation to us, the persons. And

[12] *Enn.* V.3(49)4, 12. Cf. the remarks of Ham, *Plotin, Traité 49*, pp. 54 and 116 ff.

it is we who are double. The self remains in view throughout this discussion.

Thus, Plotinus opens up the possibility of the divided soul, with a higher part and a lower part. It can scarcely be said that this is the first case of it in Platonism, since the *Phaedrus* envisages the soul which, in the image of the charioteer, flies off towards the higher regions (246 ff.). The image of the soul used here comprises horses and a charioteer, and within this amalgam there is the good and the bad; it is the good elements which draw the whole being towards the upper regions, following a struggle between the different influences. Thus, we find already in Plato the image of soul composed of different parts, even in opposition to each other, and it is from this point that the Platonic dualism flows. However, it is not clear that Plato would have envisaged such a rupture: would he have agreed that man could be described as double or two-fold, in the manner of Plotinus? Would Plato have agreed with Plotinus that only the best part of the soul may fly upwards towards thought (I.13)? One in fact feels the opposite, that this division in two is carefully avoided by Plato, since in the end the *Phaedrus* has the totality reaching the goal, not simply one part of it. The mixed character of the soul does not lead to a fragmentation into two parts. The logic pursued by Plotinus has more rigidity about it.

In conclusion, we will look at another remarkable passage. The following lines (4.15) discuss the knowledge of the self, and the reasoning begins as follows: *dianoia*, discursive or dianoetic reason, must know what it is doing. It must have some understanding that all its judgements, and all its comprehending activity, ultimately come from a capacity within itself. The internal canons must come from the intelligence. From here the conclusion is drawn that a higher principle exists which does not seek or go after, but which itself possesses, in a kind of absolute possession.

Here is the key to our discussion of the notion of 'ours'. Is Intellect 'ours'? Yes and no. If one seeks something, it does not belong to us, and it is not ours. And we know, since we are conscious of the sources of reason, that there is something else to be sought, which is therefore not ours. When discursive reason becomes conscious of these facts, it will not let up until it has known Intellect. When one knows Intellect, which possesses all in every way, one knows oneself. That is, one becomes Intellect:

Or is it in participating in Intellect, which is ours and to which we belong, that we know Intellect and ourselves?[13]

Now the question of what is ours is resolved, since we have become that which possesses everything. We only partly possess when in our normal states. And it is through an act of abstraction (*ta alla apheis*) (and here Plotinus takes up the vocabulary of negative theology) that we achieve the act of personal transformation which means that we know Intelligence, and by this means ourselves.

In conclusion: we as selves are fully realised when we possess everything, when everything belongs to us. If this cannot be said, then to that extent we are deprived of the knowledge of ourselves. But royalty awaits us, as every human being holds within himself the possibility of advancing towards a more complete state, because he possesses in himself the consciousness of what pure intelligence actually is. This knowledge brings the possibility of personal transformation, and finally seeing as Intellect sees itself.[14] And what does this tell us of the self in Plotinus? Well, we as souls do have the possibility of becoming kings, and there is certainly great attention to 'us', and to what is 'ours'. We know that Plotinus can show an interest in the 'we', the *to hemeis* of other passages. But in the case of this passage it would appear that the individual – he at least who becomes a king – is redefined out of existence. Such transformation occurs that one cannot see anything left of the individual. And through all this is a careful consideration of possession, belonging and ownership, through which 'we' and 'ours' become clearer. In fact, the passage is about two things, intellect and possession, the latter being particularly important for the understanding of the self. The kingly intellect is a king 'for us' rather than 'among us', or just simply 'ours', because he is not fully possessed by us but is the object of our aspiration. He is both ours and not ours. The limits of the self are obscurely and provisionally defined through this aporetic equivocation over what is ours, and what we possess.

[13] *Enn.* V.3(49)4, 25. [14] *Enn.* V.3(49)4, 28.

CHAPTER 6

Being and having

Being and having in Plotinus are closely linked to ideas about continuity and nearness: between self and essence there is no absolute gap. We are rather dealing with a structure which accentuates proximity. The self exists in a familiar world, which is by nature close. The theme of nearness is an interesting byway in the history of philosophy. In the thought of Heidegger, for example, there emerges from time to time a kind of emphasis on *familiarity*: the sense that the real is not foreign and thus that the self exists in a world which is close and closely adapted to it; that it lives comfortably in its environment. There is a sense of this in Plotinus, as entities move towards their own reality.

Having, or possession, is important to Plotinus and he conducts an internal dialogue over the issue, particularly in III.8(30). There is a kind of having which involves satiety, but which is not drunk with the experience of this possession: the distinction is made in the exegesis of the story of love in the *Symposium*. In passing, Plotinus notes that the nectar with which Plenty has become inebriated in the allegory must come from outside. Inebriation represents the infilling of the lower level from the higher, in the case of the principle which has fallen from a higher level, and that kind of possession of something, or infilling, is likened to drunkenness. This is a having which comes from outside and in so doing fills a void. But there is another form of possession which is more perfect, which consists of simple completeness: 'Intellect possesses itself in satiety, not in drunkenness'.[1]

This is the possession which does not depend on outside elements, so that there is no need for taking or appropriating in order to achieve

[1] *Enn.* III.5(50)9.5, 19.

completeness. Completeness is derived not by the accumulation of multiple elements, but by being a totality in the first place.

Plotinus seems to rebut an imaginary interlocutor at this point, alluding to a view which holds that the One might be said to think, in that it possesses itself: no, he replies, it is not by possessing that anything is said to think but by contemplation of the first principle. Thinking and self-possession are therefore not related: there must have been a point of view that possession and thought were related, and that self-possession led to self-thought, this possibly being an explanation of self-consciousness. However, Plotinus evidently wants a clear separation between thinking and having and this is because thinking involves a form of not-having, as we will see: if thinking were attributed to the One then we would have to suppose that the One became acquainted with things of which it formerly had no knowledge. Thinking must be excluded from the One since 'its addition would bring about diminution and defect'.[2] Thinking on the part of the One would imply, on this view, a relationship with things it does not have.

Several things have emerged from this, namely, that there are two types of fullness, ordinary satiety and intoxication: that thinking and having are separate activities; that the One does not think, as this would imply a lack. There remains implicit the question of the precise nature of the link between thinking and having (there clearly is one) and of where the One stands in relation to having. Since a higher and a lower kind of possession have been identified, then is it possible to link one of these to the Good?

Love, in the allegory, has already been identified as partly full, but partly 'seeks that which he does not have, or is lacking'.[3] In exploring thinking, we are led into the realm of that which one does not have, but seeks to have. Where there is no possession, there is a relationship of desire between the subject and that which is not possessed. Thinking is also a way of dealing with the not-possessed. Thinking or reasoning is more like sight, we are told,[4] and seeing does not involve an alteration to the seeing subject. Sight knows things without being affected: it is not as if, to use Plotinus' example, some stamp were impressed upon it so that it bore the shape of the seen

[2] *Enn.* III.9(13)9, 23. [3] *Enn.* III.5(50)9, 44. [4] *Enn.* III.6(26)2, 32.

object within itself. 'It has what it sees and again does not have it.'[5] Memory is similar in that the soul recollects without anything being placed within it: memory works in such a way that the soul manages 'to have what it does not have'.[6]

Desire then involves the pursuit of a supplement or addition, and to add something is to change the being of the subject to which it is added. For this reason in the passages above Plotinus seeks to preserve thinking, and the soul, from having the things they deal with, since this would mean a fundamental alteration to their being. Sight does not acquire anything when it sees something, like the imprint of a seal: it somehow has what it sees, but at the same time does not have it. Similarly, memory does not place new acquisitions in the soul; it somehow has what it does not have.

In a previous chapter we emphasised that loving is a form of seeing, that the knowledge of the highest being is closer to the act of seeing than the act of reasoning. The beautiful is found above all in vision.[7] Vision becomes the metaphor for the perception of the soul. Plotinus sees a harmony between the soul and beauty which causes them to relate to each other and to adapt to each other. They are, so to speak, made for each other. As Heidegger said, that which exists is fitted to the person as the hammer handle is to the hand. Seeing has its object already within it and there is no longer a separation between seeing and its object.

Let us now look at the question of having. This question of having was explored in the thought of Gabriel Marcel who considered the question of having in a phenomenological way. Let us open it up this way: do the terms 'mine' or 'my', for example 'my arm' or 'my clothes', provide an indication of having, or possession, which might help to define the self? 'Mine' is the extension of 'I' and for this reason the exploration of having, of 'my own', will be revealing as to the nature of the self or the ego in Plotinus. We may use the thought of Gabriel Marcel as a way of opening up and highlighting the issue in Plotinus, as Marcel works in a tradition to some extent descended from the ancient author: for Marcel the essential feature of having is that it involves the possession of some sort of secret, or at least the possession of something such that one is capable of *showing*. The fact

[5] *Enn.* III.6(26)2, 40. [6] *Enn.* III.6(26)2, 44. [7] *Enn.* I.6(1)1, 1.

of being able to show is the phenomenological key to this having, which is the essential feature of the self in Marcel's view. (Marcel's ideas are situated partly in an early twentieth century tradition of phenomenology.)

And there is a somewhat similar philosophy of having developed in Plotinus, though it is not generally discussed in modern expositions of his thought.[8] A rare exception is the article of Frederick Schroeder, 'Saying and Having in Plotinus'.[9] We will examine a passage discussed by Schroeder below:

> But if we do not have it in knowledge perhaps we do not have it at all? But we have it in such a way as to speak about it, but do not speak it.[10]

Schroeder in discussing this passage deals with the distinction between 'having the One', and 'saying the One'. He focuses on the question of what 'saying the One' might mean, as opposed to speaking about it, and this question is generally what has attracted attention because of the issue over language and the describability of the One. But there is the parallel question of how to construe the *possession* of the One. Frederick Schroeder distinguishes between two usages of *legein*, namely, simply 'saying', or the sense which involves 'discussing' or 'speaking about', and the further sense of unveiling or divulging. This is because Plotinus seems to use such a distinction between the two meanings of *legein*, particularly in *Enn* V.3(49)14, 4–8, where his intention is to look for the other means of disclosing the One, that means which might replace language pure and simple. And this other process could involve discursive thought. He refers to the work of Crome[11] who seeks to sketch out a kind of language of images, above all in the theurgy of Plotinus. He further cites approvingly Beierwaltes,[12] who puts forward the view that for Plotinus language is a function of difference, arising out of the image-based way of conceiving reality.

[8] For an interesting discussion of the Stoic background involved in the use of the word 'mine', and the idea of possession generally (related to the *idion hegemonikon)*, see Frédérique Ildefonse, *L'idion hègemonikon, est-ce le moi?* in G. Aubry and F. Ildefonse, *Le moi et l'intériorité* (Paris, Vrin, 2008), pp. 75, 80. This paper sets the scene for a full discussion of 'having'.

[9] (1985) *Dionysius* 9: 75–84.

[10] *Enn*. V.3(49)14, 4–8.

[11] *Symbol und Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache* (Munich, Fink, 1970).

[12] Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen* (Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1985), p. 102.

We will deal here with the other part of the issue, namely, the question of *having* the One in a way which is sufficient to speak about it, but insufficient if one wishes to declare it or pronounce its name. *Having* the One in the above passage is not an issue which has attracted general attention, possibly because the use of the word 'have' is seen as incidental, or even banal. Gwenaëlle Aubry does dwell on the issue to some extent,[13] in that she raises the 'almost hubristic' oddity of saying that we possess something which surpasses us. But against this, we may possess, in a certain sense, a king, in that he is our king; an example which Plotinus himself uses, as we have seen with the Intellect. She continues by focussing on the technical term *hexis*, as being derived from the verb *echein*, to have or to possess; this term has a certain meaning in Aristotle, for whom *hexis* means a settled state or disposition, somewhere between the potentiality (*dynamis*) and the act (*energeia*). Plato, on this exposition, distinguishes between acquiring and having and we are given the choice between an Aristotelian or a Platonic heritage for the term *hexis*. However, it seems to us that *echein* is more of a technical term for Plotinus than is *hexis*, and that he explores fully all the senses of the verb to have in its own right. The main focus of this passage is not the term *hexis*, but another Plotinian exploration of possession.

Thus, Plotinus does dwell on the way in which we have the One and this does cry out for an explanation. Exploring a little, the One is seen by Plotinus as a possession of ours, but this manner of having does not satisfy Marcel's criterion on the phenomenology of having, for example, since one is not able to show this possession. However, this having only just falls short of the Marcel criterion, since it is possible to show the One in a certain way, *peri*: we may talk *about* the One. Thus, we show not the One in itself, but peripheral information about the One. In part this is about whether we possess intellect, a question which we have dealt with in the chapter 'And we too are kings': intellect is seen as the king of faculties and is in some way possessed or held by us, but the sense of the word 'our' as in 'our intellect' is here pushed right to the limit, since intellect is by its nature universal and exists everywhere. So the question of what is

[13] Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Plotin, Traité 53* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2004), pp. 228–9.

ours and what we possess and how we possess it has to be seen in the light of this universality, since we do not possess it in a discrete or individualised way. If we deal in a notion of having which relies heavily on separated, discrete and individualised entities then we are not equipped to deal with a form of having which is involved with participating in the universal. We do say 'our world' and it is in some such sense as this that we have Intelligence.

Some words of the late Maurice Nédoncelle may also cast light on the issue:

> *Omne praedicatum inest subjecto*: the being of the predicate is in the subject. And the having of subjects concentrates in itself a number of properties, and these properties tend to extend and define the subject. But they constitute qualities which are capable of subsisting in other subjects and are endowed with some fixed stability. 'Peter is a redhead', 'Peter has red hair': here it is stated that Peter *has* redness, that is he has naturally available to him a quality and by this quality he resembles a number of other beings, namely all redheads.[14]

The idea of interest here is the way in which the copula 'is' is identified with having. 'Having' is a capacity of the subject which tends to extend the subject and to cast light on it. Nédoncelle works within the personalist philosophy of his period, which is associated with other names such as Buber, and later on Levinas, but it is true that there are some old Aristotelian principles behind these ideas, for example that the objects of the intelligence are within the intelligence. Nédoncelle develops his idea through the identification of being and having. What I have, what I possess, is the being of something else. Otherness is thus embraced, but also extinguished in the identity between the subject who possesses and its external reality. Nédoncelle continues in phenomenological vein:

> What we call our property is for the most part merely an aspect considered more stable and more pleasant than others within the procession of natural objects. These objects are essentially unfaithful to us from the moment on at which we may naively believe that we have bound them to our own history. Are thoughts or feelings themselves often ours? They slide over us and do not accompany us. The whole category of having has a moving and

[14] Maurice Nédoncelle, *Personne humaine et nature* (Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1963), p. 61.

centrifugal base: the elements of it are not even attached to the self through any constant connection.[15]

A further section discusses the destiny of having and its disappearance within personal identity:

> The affinity of having with what is in general explains the poverty of those who possess: every owner of property is a pauper when reduced to his own being and every subject is extinguished if it knows nothing other than objects. Personal identity is easily conceived without that which is non-self, but the spiritual destiny of having seems to lie in its evaporation within personal identity.[16]

We may return now to Plotinus armed with these ideas. We have discussed elsewhere the idea of the self in Plotinus, a term which he seems to identify by the 'we' (*hemeis*), and it was proposed earlier that if one is to understand the 'we' one should extend the inquiry to the 'ours', and a study of the dimensions of the 'ours' (*hemeteros*). We further note here that both these questions should be linked to the study of having. That which is ours is what we have. And there is much to be said about this seemingly innocuous term (*echo*).

First, having indicates the sensation of desire. On the desire for the One Plotinus writes as follows:

> Only is he free from enchantment . . . who knows without any possibility of error and does not pursue: he is not drawn in any direction because he possesses.[17]

This is drawn from a passage on enchantment (*goeteia*), and the condition of knowing and of having is presented as the remedy against enchantment. Enchantment has two faces, that of desire and that of seduction, but 'having' is understood to be proof against both.

The mirror is an image often used by Plotinus, and I have discussed it elsewhere. But in this context one may note that the mirror is said to have 'everything' in the sense that it is filled by images. In fact, the object appearing in the mirror is situated elsewhere, and so Plotinus says the 'mirror appears to have everything but actually has

[15] *Ibid.* p. 119. [16] *Ibid.* p. 120. [17] *Enn.* IV.4(28)44, 13.

nothing',[18] and elsewhere, in III.6(26)13, 46, on the images which come and superimpose themselves on reality, the case of the mirror is again discussed. These images are said to appear in the mirror: thus one sees at the same time both mirror and images. A distinction is drawn here with images being formed in matter: here one does not see matter. One fails to see matter both when it possesses images and when it no longer has them. But one is wary of mirror images because one sees the mirror as well as the images: the difference lies in the having, in which the mirror fails. In this passage matter *has* images, whereas the mirror does not have them: it only appears to do so. Having lends authenticity, or more strongly, having provides the foundation of being. Since this is the case, non-possession signals the need for caution, and points to the unreal. There is an additional thought here, when one looks at the ideas of Nédoncelle in relation to being and having: that is, possession underlies what is.

We want to possess, and this directs both our desire and our action.[19] Action and contemplation are bound up together and the two accompany each other. Action is for contemplation:

> And this is so because they act for the sake of a good. This means not that the good remains outside of us and not that they should not have it, but that they should have it as the result of their action.[20]

Action therefore unfolds as an activity conducted for the purpose of having. We act in order to have, and so the goal of contemplation is linked to having, in that one contemplates that which one wants to have.

Having is tied to existence. The first principle possesses everything in itself: it possesses and is not itself possessed. Since it possesses everything, it is everywhere: 'If it is not, it does not have' (V.5(32)9, 12). This passage helps us to understand the remarks on contemplation: since having is being, one can understand how it is that the goal of contemplation is said to be having. He who has everything is everywhere and there is no place which he does not inhabit. The condition is that he is not himself possessed, and in this case he

[18] *Enn.* III.6(26)7, 26, 27. [19] *Enn.* III.8(30)6, 7. [20] *Enn.* III.8(30)6, 6.

is, and is everywhere. The goal therefore is to have and not to be possessed. Possession guarantees being.

This said, it should be noted that there is a whole theme in Plotinus to do with one's own (*oikeios*) and that which is alien (*allotrios*), linking up with the Stoic theme of *oikeiosis*.[21] There is an idea of what is proper to oneself, which is the object of appropriate care and concern: and the Stoics extended this into an ethical principle, with the whole of humankind becoming the object of care and concern, not just one's own individual physical and mental 'property'. In I.2(19)4, purification (*katharsis)* is seen by Plotinus as the means of resisting going over to the alien, and here he strikes a note far removed from the Stoic ethical theme of 'ownness'. Being purified is the removal of everything alien (*allotrios*),[22] but the process of purification is itself incompletely good. Goodness is other than the process of purification, since the final state is superior to the aspiration for or the process of purification. That which is left, that part of the self which remains after purification, is not completely written off: Plotinus wonders whether we may call it something 'like the good', but also notes that it has a capacity for commingling with its opposites as well as with the good. The ability to turn inwards may be its unique skill (*arete*) but in any case it has a relationship with the good which is compared with sight and its object: sight does not have (*echein*) the objects which it sees, but by virtue of light nevertheless grasps them. Sight has impressions of the physical objects but nevertheless must bring the two into harmony, and the work of purification is something of this kind. Purification has as its main objective the removal of otherness and the prime issue here lies with the body and the resistance of desire: separation from the body is part of the purification programme of removal of otherness. The soul is viewed as pure in itself in this process, and will strive 'to remove passion as completely as possible, but if it cannot at least it is not caught up in excitement'.[23]

[21] See Pauliina Remes, 'Ownness of Conscious Experience in Ancient Philosophy' in Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki and Pauliina Remes (eds.), *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy* (Netherlands, Springer, 2007), pp. 67, 80 ff.

[22] Lines 5–6. [23] *Enn*. I.2(19)5, 12.

Thus, the 'having' which we are studying here also involves dispossessing oneself of the otherness which contributes towards outwardness. The having of what is one's own is the goal of the good man, but this requires discrimination and the ability to shed that which is alien.

In fact, 'ownness' is a highly significant theme in Plotinus. The meaning of *oikeios* and *oikeiosis* is fairly clear, and in general 'one's own' appears to be regarded as a positive, that which is real. (There is, however, a sharp qualification which we will consider in due course.) The term *oikeios* comes very close to meaning 'authentic' and it gives us a glimpse of the way in which Neoplatonic ontology operates, in that there appears to be assumed a reliable sense of what is appropriate, real and authentic to any being. There is the somewhat comforting sense that there is a bedrock 'real' or 'authentic' proper to any existent.[24] 'Ownness' is also very close to the idea of individuation, as when Plotinus says that the individual something is the separating difference constituted by the shape *proper* to each thing.[25] Another passage suggests that if our thinking was 'our own', we would be separate, independent beings: another way of construing this would be to say that if our thinking were authentically ours, we would be independent beings. It is interesting to note that thinking is not constrained by 'ownness', and this rules out individual souls as well as the clear separation of individual beings into separate and completely divided entities: the corollary is that thinking is shared.[26]

And there is an 'own life', an idea very close to authentic being, and this is what is proper or appropriate to that being.[27] The following passage is crucial:

> man would not have been moved toward such things if his movement came from powers without soul, nor would the all live thus if each particular thing did not live its own life [*oikeian zoen*], even if deliberative choice is not part of it.[28]

Clearly there is a proper, given form of life, a natural being, which should live its course.

[24] A key associated idea is that of 'remaining', or staying in place, as does the demiurge. See the discussion of remaining in Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 63 ff.

[25] *Enn.* II.4(12)4, 5. [26] *Enn.* IV.3(27)3, 28–9.

[27] *Enn.* II.4(12)9, 21. [28] *Enn.* IV.4(28)36, 24.

Matter is in an interesting position in that it is much weaker than the other forms of life: it cannot even say 'I am here' since it lacks its own way of being. It can certainly be the cause of other things appearing and becoming manifest, but it cannot do so itself as it has neither its own truth, nor its own falsehood.[29] Matter has no ability to obtrude in its own way, or be there: it has no Dasein, as Heidegger might have said.

In the *Timaeus*[30] Plato describes the maker-god, the demiurge, as setting out his dispositions and commands for the creation of the cosmos, including the combining of the elements of air, earth, fire and water and the creation of male and female. He then, having laid out all these matters, 'was dwelling in his own state in his own way'. Plotinus takes this passage and makes the demiurge into the intelligible (*noeton*),[31] with the intelligible 'abiding in its own way of life' (*ethos*). The passage clearly reflects the *Timaeus*, as there is mention of fire and also of creating the intelligible as an image and likeness of the intelligent, but interestingly imports the word *oikeios* where Plato does not use it. That is, Plotinus wants to use the notion of the demiurge abiding in his own *ethos*, in his own authentic way, but does so by using the concept of 'ownness' (*oikeios*). Thus, this passage is really a gloss on Plato, in which Plotinus incorporates his own technical vocabulary and conceptual structure, according to which things have their proper 'ownness' and way of being: as is often the case Plotinus may be bringing a rigidity to the thought of Plato which may not be present, or which may be merely latent. Plotinus is concerned to give currency to his particular view of 'ownness'.

There is a sense of ownness which comes close to likeness or being akin to something, and such a connotation is a slight shift away from the idea of ownness as authenticity, in the sense that likeness may imply some differentiation where mere resemblance is in view. The kind of differentiation which lurks here is addressed in the following:

> They [the Good and Intellect] are replete with glory and are pursued by the soul as it comes from thence and again lies towards them: as akin (*oikeia*) then, but not as good.[32]

[29] *Enn.* III.6(26)15, 25. [30] 42e5–6.
[31] *Enn.* V.4(7)2, 22 and 34. [32] *Enn.* VI.7(38)21, 8.

It would not be possible to translate here through a word related to 'ownness' since the point of the sentence is a clear separation between the soul and the higher principles, a separation which is, of course, mitigated and compensated for by the disposition of the soul towards the Good and the Intellect, as well as its likeness. But where we have a case of likeness and not identity, a gap of large proportions can open up. Indeed, the very concept of 'ownness' secretes within itself this straddling of the gap between identity and similarity. There is in the world of otherness much that is akin, and the various parts of the All take to themselves that which is akin to them, and they dismiss that which is other.[33]

The world of otherness and dissimilarity is clearly evil, so the soul looks for what is akin or what is its own: health is the state of being with one's own and being fully unified, but 'illness is other (*allotrion*) and not our own (*oikeion*), and therefore stands out clearly because it is so very different from us'.[34] The situation is clearer when we are talking about that which is utterly alien to us: it is to be avoided and cast off, but there is a vast continuum along which we may expect to find, eventually, the familiar, the like and eventually one's own, all of which categories are bundled within this one concept of 'ownness'.

Is 'ownness' the ideal state? It will be clear by now that we find a range of meanings in the word and there is another passage in which the contradiction inherent in resemblance – that something is like without at the same time being identical, thus leaving open a question about some degree of unlikeness somewhere in the spectrum – is clearly laid out as a question. Ownness is a good guide when looking downwards, or towards the realm of the unlike, but what of the situation when looking up?

The intellect has a life, and both intellect and its life are in the form of the Good. Life is an activity of the good, or more exactly 'from' the good, says Plotinus. Both entities are 'filled with glory' and that is shared by the soul because it comes from them. The soul is 'akin' as Armstrong translates, or one could equally well say 'they are the soul's own'.[35] But ownness is not enough, and Plotinus adds

[33] *Enn*. IV.4(28)32, 38. [34] *Enn*. V.8(31)11, 30.

[35] *Enn*. VI.7(38)21, 6–9; A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus, with an English Translation*, Loeb Classical Library, vols I–VII (London/Cambridge, Heinemann, 1967), p. 154.

the qualification that despite this clear link, they are not themselves the Good. Here, Plotinus chooses to stress the unlikeness element of the idea of ownness, whereas in most cases he shines a light on the positive side of what I have called the authenticity, or ownness, of being. This is a very important qualification to the idea of ownness since Plotinus builds into the gap left by some degree of unlikeness, the very intensity of desire which drives entities towards the Good. It is because of what they do not have in full that their desire is kindled and more intensely directed towards that which is above them. This is the Plotinian grace: the something from beyond, lightly bathing a being, sufficient to stimulate the most intense *eros*, the desire for what is not there but which is dimly apprehended, essentially desire for the unknown or partially known.

A second passage in this same treatise focuses equally clearly on this same limitation of ownness, again rendered by the word 'akin' in Armstrong's translation, showing the difficulty of capturing the concept of *to oikeion*. It is hard to get away from that translation here, since Plotinus is focussing on the resemblance aspect of the meaning of *to oikeion*, which in other contexts can come close to meaning 'authentic being'. On the subject of forms Plotinus asks:

> Is this form good by being akin to that yonder, and is its desire directed towards what is akin? No; for what is like it is akin and if it wishes for and delights in the like it does not yet have the Good. It must be said that one must judge the good by that which is stronger than the akin and that which is better than the thing itself.[36]

Need is the driver, and where there is genuine need, the Good is the object of love, not the forms which display some resemblance only to the Good. These passages go to the heart of the equivocation noted at the end of Chapter 5, over the limits of the self and the possession of the highest form of intelligence. We both have and do not have the Intelligence, which is the object of our desire rather than of our possession.

Finally on this question of ownness, the equivocation or range of meaning we have referred to is drastically reduced when it is raised in relation to the Good. The Good is our own (*to oikeion*), and

[36] *Enn.* VI.7(38)27, 3–9; Armstrong, Loeb edn, p. 169.

'therefore we must not seek it outside'. Why not outside? Because here we are leaving that which might be 'akin' or merely 'like', and moving to that which is genuinely our own, genuinely and authentically ours. There is no separation in the Good, no other and therefore it is of itself: 'every nature presses on to [the Good], towards itself'. The Good is of this same nature, and is this nature.[37] This is the real meaning of oneness.

Things are therefore different in relation to the One. The connection between having and completeness, genuine universal having, does not obtain at this level, and nor does the idea of ownness, given the element of unlikeness in its spectrum of meanings. Nor does the issue of shedding otherness through purification arise. Thus, the question is raised of whether the first principle thinks itself: it is understood that it possesses everything, but there is a question about whether it is self-reflexive in the sense that it can think itself: the reply is that 'possessing oneself is not thinking' (*Enn.* III.9(13)9, 6). Thinking is in effect the contemplation of the One and we have seen that contemplation is the manifestation of the desire to have, not of having itself. So thinking and self-possession, or more precisely self-identity, are separated quite clearly. Having is the higher state.

In conclusion, the Plotinian self must be understood in the context of relationships of belonging and ownership, of which the primary example is that of having. And having is a larger idea than knowing, because being and having are intimately connected. It is important to note that this issue is not about proximity but possession. Whatever desire or aspiration manifests itself, wherever there is thought or action, the goal is always having, because it is through possession that being establishes itself.

The Good, however, needs nothing and pursues nothing. There is no need for it to think either, since thinking is a form of contemplation designed to allow the thinker to take hold of something which he does not possess, from outside. Thus:

> That which comes before them neither needs, nor has: otherwise it would not be the Good.[38]

[37] *Enn.* VI.5(23)1, 17–21 passim. [38] *Enn.* III.8(30)11, 44.

Consciousness of self and self-thought are second-order activities, since actualising the consciousness is necessary for self-understanding. The very activity of coming to understand oneself must mean that such self-understanding was previously lacking. Such a deficiency means that the need to 'have' is there, and thinking is undertaken to fill this gap.

It is not possible for the One to need or to have: consequently thinking is excluded from the One. To add thinking to the One is the paradoxical addition of a supplement which results in 'privation and defect'.[39] Having, together with its related deficit, not-having, is the key driver towards being and self-actualisation for all beings other than the One.

[39] *Enn.* III.9(13)9, 23.

CHAPTER 7

Self-knowledge

The idea of the self and its own ranges over, as we have seen, the spectrum of the like and the unlike, the same and the other. Ownness is the idea by which Plotinus integrates the two opposing principles of identity and otherness, in that owning something provides the bridge between selfhood and otherness. But otherness is a key part of Plato's approach to self-knowledge, and consideration of this issue starts with two passages of Plato, both to do with self-knowledge as derived from the other, but the other in a peculiar sense: that other which is a mirror, and which in some sense sends back something of oneself. As is well known, the idea of the mirror as the key to self-knowledge has an extraordinary range in Western philosophy moving on from Plato through to the exegesis of the myth of Narcissus, down to the Neo-Freudian philosophy of Jacques Lacan, who wrote about the mirror-stage traversed by the infant as the key to personal development.

Self-knowledge is a central issue for Plotinus: what is it that has made the souls be ignorant of themselves, he asks.[1] But self-knowledge has a problem about it, in the Greek tradition, in that knowledge usually involves something else. This *aporia* was developed by Plato in the *Charmides*,[2] and was taken as a central dilemma by Plotinus who deals with it throughout this treatise, particularly in V.1(10)3, where he responds to the dilemma as posed by the sceptics.[3] He asks whether we have to imagine self-thinking as requiring a complex entity, with one part dedicated to looking at the other parts. In general, Plotinus

[1] *Enn.* V.1(10)1, 1–4. [2] 164d–169c.

[3] See Pierre Courcelle, *Connaîs-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard* (Paris, Etudes Augustiniennes, 1974), p. 83.

will take a radical stance on these issues. Any concern with oneself will in the end be about what lies before one, or above,[4] and self-thought will be excluded from the highest form of being.

Continuing with the Platonic background, we also have the *Phaedrus* 254–5, which reminds us that reverence, fear and awe are all part of the experience of love, as these emotions are inspired by true beauty, which lies at the origin of love. It is the lover who feels reverence, fear and awe; the beloved has an entirely different experience, and is overwhelmed by the goodwill and attentiveness of the lover, and conceives in response a kind of love himself: he does not quite know why this is happening to him, like someone who has caught an infection unawares, but undergoes the experience all the same: 'he sees himself in his lover as in a mirror, but is unaware of this'.[5]

Importantly the image of love which is installed in the beloved does not match up with that in the soul of the lover, and whilst the whole experience of love is pleasurable for the beloved, he considers this experience to be a matter of friendship only.

This tantalisingly brief reference to the mirror nevertheless allows us to reflect on a theme of Platonism: there appears to be an implication that self-knowledge is somehow tied up with a reflection of oneself sent back from the other, as the mirror throws back an image. In this passage there does not appear to be any suggestion that the image seen in the mirror of the lover is a true reflection, accurate in all respects, but rather an image which is inflated or embellished by the passion of the lover himself or herself. Nevertheless, there is a clear suggestion here of what Jean Pépin calls the *alter ego*, the other essential to any form of self-knowledge, and here Pépin traces this theme from its Platonic origins through the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions.[6]

The most famous discussion in Plato of the other as mirror occurs in the *First Alcibiades* 132d ff., where the subject of self-knowledge is raised. In the playful conversation between Alcibiades and Socrates,

[4] *Enn*. VI.9(9)2, 35. See Courcelle, *Connaîs-toi toi-même*, p. 86, who cites some Gnostic and Christian parallels.

[5] *Phaedrus* 255d5.

[6] Jean Pépin, 'Le prototype de la deuxième attitude: Le Ier Alcibiade; sa postérité' in *Idées Grecques sur L'homme et sur dieu* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1971), pp. 71, 79, 83 and passim.

the Delphic command 'know thyself' has come up, and Socrates asks how one would go about it if the command were 'see thyself'. The answer lies with 'mirrors and things of that sort', and the discussion moves to the fact that one can see oneself reflected in the pupil of the eye of the person opposite. The soul must also look at another soul to obtain a reflection, and eventually the conclusion comes that one can only truly know oneself by looking at God. The significant element here is that Socrates has introduced the idea of the eye of the other being the perfect mirror: there is not only the mirror involved, and the reflection it gives back, but also the fact that that mirror is framed within the face of the other person. Thus, the mirror does not exist in isolation, nor is it simply available in nature like the mirror of Narcissus, but is that mirror which lies within the gaze of another human being. In due course the analogy moves to the idea of the soul looking at god, but the point is intact, namely, that self-knowledge comes from self-contemplation in the mirror provided by an other, but essentially like, persona. The mirror is framed in an alternative self, and this view of self-knowledge becomes foundational. The authenticity of the dialogue is irrelevant to the question of the literary tradition, as these views became irresistibly associated with Platonism, rightly or wrongly. As Pépin shows, the tradition evolved in such a way as to make a reference to the mirror in self-knowledge an almost inevitable doffing of the hat to the authority of the Platonist tradition, such that even St Paul may have been showing his own literary credentials and giving his own particular reworking of the tradition in his famous words about 'seeing in a glass darkly'.[7] Plotinus has his own take-up of the mirror tradition, which we will now discuss.

The sending-something-back of the mirror in Plotinus is commented on by Aquila,[8] who makes a comparison with the views of Sartre about external promptings in the world of consciousness. The perceived or imagined world is 'definitive of the very self whose world it is in the first place' (p. 10). In making this comparison, Aquila relies on a passage of Plotinus[9] which is to do with

[7] See Raoul Mortley, 'The Mirror and I Corinthians 13, 12 in the Epistemology of Clement of Alexandria' (1976) *Vigiliae Christianae* 30: 109–20.

[8] Richard E. Aquila, 'On Plotinus and the "Togetherness" of Consciousness' (1992) *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30: 7, 9.

[9] *Enn*. I.4(46)10, 7 ff.

awareness and self-awareness, and in which the mirror image of mental activity may or may not be present. Plotinus is saying that awareness occurs when intellectual activity is in a way 'sent back' as happens with a mirror reflection from a clear and bright surface. Plotinus goes on to say that the lack of a mirror image 'sent back' does not imply the absence of the intellectual activity in the first place. The mirror image returns to us when the soul is untroubled and undisturbed (like a clear mirror), but when it is troubled in some way, the image fails to appear. Plotinus is attempting to show in this passage that intellectual activity is prior to awareness (*antilepsis*): he regards it as axiomatic that thinking and being are the same, reflecting of course Parmenides, but his interpretation of that axiom is that awareness is a second-order event and that it only comes about when intellectual activity is reflected back, or has a reflexive character. So thought can take place without awareness taking place, and it can be carried on without such awareness: the example Plotinus gives is that the reader is not necessarily aware that he is reading, particularly when he is really concentrating; the brave man who is in the midst of an act of great courage is quite unaware of his bravery. Thought precedes awareness, and may take place without it being present.

Our interest here is not so much in the order of events, but in the idea that awareness depends on a mirror image being returned. This fits perfectly with the theme of self-knowledge as enunciated by Plato in that self-knowledge can also be construed as a secondary activity coming later in the order of events, and requiring in particular the presence of a mirror, in this case a mirror framed within the gaze of another. We should note that two themes are essential to the Platonist legacy here, one being that there is a mirror image, but the second being that this mirror image is 'sent back' from the seeing of the other. The mirror is not simply a passive tool, a common or garden mirror, but rather one that is framed in the eyes of the other.

Aquila points out (p. 19) a third factor about mirrors, which arises in the discussion of Plotinus. He asks whether Plotinus could have simply used the metaphor of a wax tablet, in other words suggesting that an image could be emitted and could well be registered as an imprint on a wax tablet, an image well known in the Platonic

tradition. He suggests that we not confuse our own modern understanding of mirrors with that which may have obtained in antiquity, and the difference turns on the question of whether the image is in fact in or on the mirror. Plotinus does allow for the idea that there may only appear to be images of things on the mirrors. A wax tablet would clearly have something imprinted on it, but that is what one fails to find with a mirror. 'As we know, the reception of images in mirrors, as opposed to wax tablets, *is* precisely a reflection back of something from mirrors.'[10]

Plotinus does ask the question of whether images seen in mirrors are in them, or on them. As Aquila says in this passage, the ancient view of perception lies behind this discussion, and Plotinus works on the assumption that images are emitted from bodies which imprint themselves on the world:

> If then there is something in mirrors, let there be sensibles in matter in the same way; but if there is not, but only appears to be, then we must admit that things only appear on matter, having as the cause of their appearance the existence of the real beings, in which real beings always really participate, though beings which are not real do not really do so.[11]

For Plotinus, images take their form in matter, or through matter, and the conundrum posed by mirror images is that they may depart, whilst that in which they appeared still remains. Other things exist, whilst being unseen or unilluminated, such as the air: and indeed matter gives rise to the appearance of things without itself being seen. Unlike this, the mirror is itself visible, and remains so even when the image it has offered up has departed. Plotinus is concerned here with the extent to which matter is involved in the image it creates, whether it in some sense swallows up and transforms the image which it receives. The mirror, by contrast, simply offers up the image without alteration to it, or itself. The mirror becomes a model for understanding the function of matter, though in the end matter is not conceived of in this way, that is, as passively sending back an image without alteration.

The key issues with the mirror are that it sends back, and in the tradition of the *First Alcibiades*, that it is framed in the gaze

[10] Aquila, 'Plotinus and the "Togetherness" of Consciousness', 19.
[11] *Enn.* III.6(26)13, 48 ff.

of the other. In understanding the Platonic view, this latter point is essential in that not just any mirror-image is held to provide self-knowledge, but the image sent back by one's interlocutor. Other selves are essential for self-knowledge. Pépin's treatment of the reception of the *First Alcibiades* tradition focuses mainly on the soul issue, and he lists the three passages in which one may indisputably find the influence of that dialogue.[12] But there are numerous ways in which Plotinus addresses its ideas; 'refining them by numerous distinctions, debating them even as he welcomes them, integrating them into a much more flexible whole, in which they appear to evaporate'.[13] Man cannot be reduced to a single being, a soul, since he inhabits a body, and we know our body as 'ours'. Here, Plotinus moves to distinguish between individuals through the use of the word 'ours', as we have seen elsewhere, in that he will not reduce humanity to being nothing other than a soul. The body is with soul: when we see other bodies suffer we register this in a dispassionate way, but pain and pleasure within ourselves affect us differently: we are concerned with our bodies because they belong to us, or they are 'ours'.[14] The 'we' refers to the dominant part (*to kurion*) of us and the body is similarly 'ours', albeit in a different way. Thus, soul or intelligence may use the body, or control it, or suffer it, but the body is ours every bit as much as this dominant part. This is one of the important qualifications, or transformations, to the tradition of the *First Alcibiades*, to which Pépin refers, and it is a move of highly significant proportions: it virtually establishes the possibility of an individual self, by designating the body as specifically linked to the higher part, in a specific unity which gives rise to individual experience. Personal experience is unique to the body soul complex, and this is conveyed by Plotinus' unique use of the words 'we' and 'ours', and as we saw in the last chapter by his unique idea of possession and ownness.

[12] Pépin, *Idées Grecques sur L'homme et sur dieu*, p. 95 ff.: *Enn*. I.1(53)3, 3; IV.4(28)43, 20–1; VI.7(38)5, 24. See Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Plotin, Traité 53* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2004).

[13] Pépin, *Idées Grecques sur L'homme et sur dieu*, p. 96. See also the important remarks of Aubry, *Plotin. Traité 53*, p. 110 ff. She notes that this whole treatise is an interpretation of the *First Alcibiades*, from the first lines, and asks the question of why Plato's question 'What is man?' is replaced with 'Who is the subject of the passions?' in the opening words of treatise 53. Or as we would say: 'Who owns the passions?'. To what are they proper?

[14] *Enn*. IV.4(28)18, 12.

One might expect that such an emphasis on individuality could lay the groundwork for Plotinus to stress the importance of the other in self-knowledge. In fact, the degree of separateness of individuals in Plotinus is quite striking, particularly when juxtaposed with the Platonic view of the indestructibility of the soul in the *Phaedo*, and its refusal to capitulate to embodiment. Plotinus does specifically emphasise that individuals have different archetypes or structures, arguing that there is not one single *logos* for human beings, and that no one single human paradigm can serve for others. Human beings are not like copies of an original image of Socrates, reproduced over and over again from the same original.[15] This discussion is crucial to the question of discovering Plotinus' view of individuation, or the way in which individual personae come to be.

Pauliina Remes asks the question of whether the intelligible order is inhabited by exactly identical soul-forms,[16] noting that if this were the case they might turn out to be simply one and the same form. Yet it cannot be the case (she argues) that embodiment is the cause of the individuality of the personal self, as this would mean that souls were differentiated by the specific matter in which they are implanted. Matter is the source of imperfection in Plotinus' thought and were it to be the case that matter was the cause and source of individual selves, then these same individual selves would be examples of decay and falling away from essence.

But is it possible that the differentiation brought about by matter is not such a dilemma for Plotinus? We should remember that even whilst matter is characterised as a falling away into unlikeness, the connectedness of being also serves to recuperate it, especially in that we have argued that the concept of ownness and possession is for Plotinus the way of reconciling identity and otherness. In the discussion of V.9(5)12, Plotinus raises the question of forms of man and of individuals: he asserts that there is no form of Socrates, but only a form of man. But in relation to this he raises the question of whether there is also the form of the individual, in that he concludes that there must be some kind of individuality in a formal sense, since there are

[15] *Enn*. V.7(18)1, 16 ff.

[16] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 78.

widely variant cases of individuation in separate beings. So in typical Platonic fashion, there is a general concept of individuality which must exist, or which might exist, since there are numerous separate cases which fall under this general grouping. Taking the example of noses, Plotinus suggests that because one man has a snub nose, and the other an aquiline nose, that there may be specific differences in the form of man which explain these separate and distinct examples of noses. However, he goes on to say:

> but the fact that one man has one kind of aquiline nose, and one another, comes from their matter: and some differences are contained in the forming principle, but others are produced by matter and a different place of abode.[17]

One does not see any condemnation or regret over the differentiation produced by matter, and the fact that any form of difference will be insufficient to produce the differentiation which one observes in the real world, thus requiring contribution by matter itself and by where the instantiation occurs. In V.9(5)13, Plotinus returns to the differentiation of place, while agreeing that the differences between souls (in say levels of honour or moral integrity) must be accounted for as things coming about through those forms themselves existing in a different mode. The intelligible world is said to be everywhere, but the sensible world in one place only: thus, there is differentiation and differentiation, the provenance of one being the world of forms and the other being the world of place, just as, I suppose, there are sunny spots and dark spots which Plotinus would view as contributing to the colour differentiation of objects.

The myriad individuations in the real world leads to a bewildering set of complications if one is trying to establish that transcendent principles create the real world: how many kinds of noses are there? What kind of combination of forms or formative principles can produce this multitudinous variety? For Pauliina Remes, 'each combination that can and will be instantiated in matter exists in the intelligible as a possibility of embodiment'.[18] This statement certainly appears to capture what Plotinus actually thought, but his view stretches belief. The heavens seem to be populated with an enormous quantity of metaphysical principles such that in the end the forms

[17] *Enn.* V(9)5, 12, 8 ff. [18] Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 81.

appear to be copying physical reality, in order to explain it. Plotinus does himself say that such questions are difficult,[19] and he does appear to equivocate in that he stresses that the logos or formative principle cannot include matter, but remains a principle which enters matter and brings it to completion. He further says that the formative principle must be contemplated 'bare' and in the absence of matter, but he also remarkably says that the formative principle is inseparable from matter: it is possible, he believes, to contemplate the separated formative principle, but that is a different question, and it resides in intellect itself. One sees here the difficulty of the problem in that the matter instantiated logos cannot be fully grasped without both elements being grasped simultaneously, and if the Logos is to be contemplated in its own right then that has to be a separate epistemic activity. All this tends towards an admission that matter is an essential part of formed reality, and has to be considered as a hybrid consisting of both formal and sensible attributes.[20] Matter is what it is, and has to be grasped in its own right.

It is difficult to resist the idea that matter is what contributes the specificity of the individual entity. In VI.7(38)9, Plotinus describes the procession downwards: the intellect has the power to be everything, but we apprehend in each thing what it actually (*en energeia*) is (l.35). What it actually is, is the last and lowest example, in that if we take the example of a horse, the horse is simply where it stopped in its continual outgoing. Something is always left behind as intellect proceeds downwards, and there is a continual loss of being. However, in losing different things new things are added on, which are simply there because of the deficiency which has been engendered. Plotinus gives an example of this with the appearance of nails, claws and fangs, and also of horns. These things are obviously not in the intelligible but they come about because of the deficiency engendered by the movement down from perfection. The next observation, that there is no need for horns in the intelligible, has the sound of an oft used example in this context, presumably in a discussion of odd or unlikely forms. There is no need for horns thither, but as intellect descends it finds the need of them, for defence purposes, and at the same time finds within itself the remedy for the deficiency as

[19] *Enn.* II.7(37)2, 43. [20] *Enn.* II.7(37)3, 10–1.

it becomes necessary. The argument is that, since in the state of intellect it has completeness, the being will produce horns in the lower levels of life, since there completeness requires it, given the need for defence.[21] Self-sufficiency means that if it is complete as intellect, it will be complete as a living creature, and will therefore grow what is necessary depending on its circumstances. Recognising the myriad forms and shapes this might lead to, Plotinus insists on the unity of being, and that through wholeness in unity the myriad parts are stronger than as individuals.[22]

Plotinus here states again that all true being comes from above, in a teleological unwinding of reality such that each state fulfils its determined form in whatever context it finds itself. In a lyrical passage Plotinus describes true reality as 'boiling with life' and asserts that all flows from a single source: there is only one sweetness, which contains within it all the varied kinds of sweetness, and only one quality of wine, which has within itself all the tastes of every wine.[23] But it remains true that individuation comes from matter. This must also hold for the individual self, that it is the embodiment that produces the individual, in all its absurdity, with noses made up of two differently shaped nostrils and all the multiple parts.

This view is a struggle: intellect seems bent on going down into ever more discrete shapes yet must at the same time retain its integrity. Plotinus compares this process to a 'wandering',[24] but he is at pains to defend it against any suggestion that it is thereby diminished. If intellect remained homogeneous and unvaried, it would lack majesty: it is precisely the fact that it is awakened by otherness[25] that gives it its activity. The fact that intellect is awakened by otherness, a seminal phrase, gives us the clue that Plotinus sees a positive role for the physical despite all impressions to the contrary:

> Intellect must live all things, from all directions, and nothing must be unlived. It must move to all things, or rather have moved to all things.[26]

This positive role attributed to otherness here, as that which awakens, needs to be emphasised, in that the completeness of the All seems to

[21] *Enn.* VI.7(38)10, 1–5. [22] *Enn.* VI.7(38)10, 12. [23] *Enn.* VI.7(38)12, 24–30.
[24] *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 30 ff. [25] *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 11. [26] *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 14 ff.

be dependent on it, and this leads Plotinus to consider the issues of sameness and difference. Identity cannot be lost in this moving out to otherness, or if it were, some link to the essential intellect would be lost. The answer to this conundrum, drawn from the traditions of Greek philosophy, is that everything proceeds from both the same and the other, and bears the characteristics of each. The conclusion is that intellect is 'all that is the same and all that is other',[27] and no other is left out of this comprehensiveness.

Thus, whilst intellect wanders, it is natural for it to do so, and it wanders within itself, and as it does so beings accompany it. Its wandering abides, and takes place in the 'plain of truth', an expression Plotinus borrows from Plato's *Phaedrus*:[28]

> It possesses and encompasses all and makes for itself a place for its movement, and the place is the same as that for which it is the place.[29]

Thus, intellect goes out and creates for itself a place for the all to exist, full of all its otherness, and by a deft aphairetic move Plotinus negates the idea of place, saying that in this case the place and that which it accommodates are not different from each other: we might compare the idea of a museum which houses artefacts, but from which idea we remove the distinction between the museum and the artefacts it houses. It is at once the museum and the artefacts, both, simultaneously. Intellect has a sameness which can cut across any differentiation: hence the need for the apophatic thought experiment. Intellect is both itself, and where it is. Intellect is by nature active, and does not stand still: if it did, it would not think. This ceaseless movement is compared by Plotinus to that of a traveller, who moves through different areas but personally remains the same (l.44 ff.). Throughout this passage Plotinus is concerned to allow for variegated reality, of all kinds of shapes, sizes and species, but also wants to wrap it up in some kind of wholeness. This wholeness comes from the notion that everything is already contained in intellect as it moves outwards and downwards: it is already otherness, for example. So that when it becomes other than itself, it is simply realising itself, and the otherness from itself has to be negated away. The apophatic remedy is never absent from this discussion, as apparent unlikeness

[27] *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 24–5. [28] *Phaedrus* 248b6, *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 29 ff. [29] At line 37.

has to be continually negated away in the interests of the deeper and counter-intuitive unity: the apophatic method of Plotinus is continually used for the embracing of contradictions, and the annulment of them, which allows insight into some deeper underlying reality:

> But intellect always keeps the same journeying through the things which are not the same, because it does not change, but absolute sameness is present with things which are other: for if absolute sameness is not in the things which are other, then intellect is at rest and its actuality and activity are nowhere.[30]

This language about sameness appears to be an echo of Plato's *Phaedrus* 78d, where the same language for sameness (*hosautos kata tauta*) is used, and in the same context of endeavouring to determine whether ultimate essence is in any way subject to change. Plotinus simply absorbs the contradiction, by saying that sameness is in otherness.

This manifold character of reality, and the character of intellect, pursuing as it does every possibility to its ultimate instantiation, leaves a world full of differentiation. Plotinus has sought to rescue it by finding the differentiation to be seminally present in the originating principle, rather as an architect might have a design fully conceived mentally before it is laid out in linear terms, after all the calculations, for all to see. But he still finds it necessary to deny that the difference in the world is not that of things 'confused' but of things existing in unity.[31] What binds together this vision of extraordinary heterogeneity? The answer is the old Empedoclean answer: love or *philia*. True love is being bound in unity, and not separated. This underlines the fact that love and desire in Platonism are always about otherness, difference and a sense of lack: it is natural then that Plotinus should progress to *eros* as the key to existing within the world of difference. Whilst in some sense he has explained to his own satisfaction that otherness is sameness fully realised, he wishes to look at the fate of those beings who reside within a world populated by these extreme points of differentiation, and how they relate to them, or across them.

[30] *Enn.* VI.7(38)13, 47. [31] *Enn.* VI.7(38)14, 19.

Earlier, we explored the range of meanings in the word *oikeion*, ownness; in this context these things, which continually generate themselves out to extremes of difference are brought together under the other end of the meaning of the word, namely, likeness within difference. As we have seen, Armstrong translates *oikeion* in these cases as 'akin'.[32] The things which have come from the Good are said to be not good, but 'akin' to the good. It is in this context that desire comes into its own, in that the natural effect of sensing kinship with the Good in an object, mere kinship, causes the soul to aspire to that which is reflected there in some kind of likeness, but which is not itself present: the Good. It is the sense of what is missing which stimulates the most intense desire:

> There comes into being that intense love for them, not insofar as they are what they are, but in that, being already what they are, they receive something other, from there beyond.[33]

This is the Plotinian grace, the light from above, he goes on to say, which endows things with their full colours, and which excites the most intense longing for that which is above. Grace (*charis*) is the gift of the Good to things below, which endows them with a quality which excites passionate love in the soul. The soul is dependent on this light from above, and without it would remain flat and unresponsive: but on seeing it, it goes into an ecstatic dance, and is filled with passionate longing.[34]

There follows a long analysis of desire. Desire is now seen to be the key to the problem of being lost in the maze of otherness that has been described, a constant process of differentiation, moving into yet more differentiation. Desire appears to be caused by the sense of what is absent, not what is present: that which is present simply excites desire for what is not there, or only fleetingly glimpsed. It is the lack in the present object which brings desire into existence, but lack is only seen as lack because of the ability to sense what a more complete object would resemble. The 'grace' which plays upon the object stimulates the desire to look beyond the object itself: it endows the object with an ethereal quality whilst simultaneously evacuating the object of significance. Plotinus is concerned now with the object of desire: what pleasure is sought in the paroxysm of desire for that

[32] For example, *Enn.* VI.7(38)21, 10. [33] *Enn.* VI.7(38)21, 12. [34] *Enn.* VI.7(38)22, 10.

which lies above? Is the good there for itself, or there for another?[35] Is the goal of desire simply pleasure or enjoyment? In Ch. 25 he raises the question of Plato's *Philebus*,[36] as to whether, as Plotinus puts it, pleasure is located in the final stage, and whether the Good has that about it which causes desire. Plotinus considers that if there is genuine desire, then there must be genuine delight on finding its object: there is, one supposes, some sort of problem about experiencing desire which never ends in enjoyment. Thus, he distinguishes between the Good, and the good for us: there is a good for every lower being, which lies just above it. It is on that level that desire seeks fulfilment and finds it in each higher stage. But it seems that this paradigm does not function at the very highest levels, in that the First does not experience desire or delight. Desire must not become an end itself:

> The Good must be desirable, but does not however become good by being desirable, but becomes desirable by being good.[37]

That is, desire does not have its own rhythm or destiny, which is self-justifying, but it finds its source in the goodness of the Good: it is, in a sense, driven towards a goal. But there can be deception, or mistaken desire, in that desire can direct itself towards the wrong object; this is in a sense an awkward fact for Plotinus, since his universe is so tightly constructed. That desire can be mistaken as to its object needs explanation, and his view is that such deception, if it occurs, results from the existence of some likeness to the good, some simulacrum, which disorients the lover: but even here there is a solution, in that even the simulacrum must contain some goodness (otherwise it would not exist), and this goodness, when it comes, 'leaves the source of its deception'.[38] There is no room for aimless or wandering *eros* in such a constructed world.

In this general theory of desire, where lies the individual and his 'own'? Looking for one's 'own', or that which is akin, could take us across the field, in a lateral direction, to another person, for example; the virtue of *to oikeion* rather lies in detecting that which is the source of the kinship, namely, that which lies immediately above, not across. We did claim to find in the word *oikeion* various meanings, including

[35] *Enn.* VI.7(38)24, 14–15.
[36] Plato, *Philebus* 21d–22a, 61b–d.
[37] *Enn.* VI.7(38)25, 17.
[38] *Enn.* VI.7(38)26, 5.

the ideas of authentic being, one's own, and also that which is related. Here, Plotinus turns back to the idea of authenticity in what we have: the road to the authentic lies upwards. We have it, but we are also aware that we have something that is related to a more complete and full state of existence.

What of self-knowledge in all of this? Within this general theory of desire, we may ask about the role of the other in self-development. Plotinus seems to be avoiding it:

> Those who are pure and more good, have a closer kinship (*oikeiosis*) with themselves.[39]

This is a crucial passage, but the word *oikeiosis* is difficult to translate; we have adopted Armstrong's 'kinship'. Plotinus does himself contrast it with 'otherness', and in these passages 'otherness' (*allotriosis*) is easy enough to translate, though the contrasting state of *oikeiosis* is not.[40] If we understand that he is speaking of the soul's 'ownnesses' as opposed to its 'othernesses', we are close to it, but we must also understand that 'ownness' contains the idea of authentic or genuine being. It is by one's own that one is linked to the real. In the above passages Plotinus recognises that alterations may occur in the soul, as 'other', contrasting with the authentic ownness of the stable state.

Thus, turning back to what is one's own is said to be the path followed by the good and the pure. And what of the other as the key to self-knowledge, a position first enunciated in the *First Alcibiades*, and picked up in so many ways by the subsequent tradition? Plotinus does not seem to be in the same camp at all. In the first place, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Plotinus refuses to reduce humankind to souls: we are what is 'ours' and that includes our bodies. Matter is, of course, of a lower order, and brings about the othernesses which we undeniably experience, but matter is also marked by Intellect, wherever and however it exists: 'If then what is loveable is not matter, but that which is formed through the form, and the form upon matter comes from soul'.[41]

Now, Plotinus could have said that we might look across, laterally, and find kinship or likeness in others around us, and the traces of

[39] *Enn.* VI.7(38)27, 19.
[40] *Enn.* III.6(26)1, 21 and III.6(26)3, 1.
[41] *Enn.* VI.7(38)33, 34.

form in matter, but he does not: the route upwards is through what we have, starting with our bodies and moving up. We will look at the attraction of the beauty around and across from the individual in the following two chapters, and Plotinus does show a surprising capacity to appreciate it.

Nevertheless, the individual for Plotinus does include its instantiation in matter, and this means that to find our true being we must adhere to what we have, what we own, and we must seek out the kinship it bears with what is above.[42] The starting-point is what we have. As we have argued in Chapter 7, the 'we' is what we have, and when we possess this truly we are closer to the essence. And in Chapter 5 we noted that the pursuit of the kingly intellect is carried out through the pursuit of what is ours, whilst in Chapter 6 we refine more closely that idea of having, and that which is one's own.

The structure of desire which Plotinus has set up, as described above and in the chapter on *eros*, is based on two things: first, the sense of lack generated by the experience of imperfection in beings, and secondly, that glimpse of the above which, grace-like, plays like a light upon beings. And as we argued in Chapter 4, Plotinus' *eros* introduces a new idea into the interpretation of Plato, namely, that real *eros* involves self-sufficiency. Love is not at all about the other, and the story of Plato's *Symposium* is radically reinterpreted in order to remove any sense of lateral interaction.

Finally, purification involves stripping away all otherness.[43] That leaves us with 'ownness' as the way forward. Self-knowledge cannot involve the other for all these reasons. We are in our bodies as individuals: we are what we have, and the path to self-knowledge involves following what we have back up to its source. Plotinus' sense of the individual is fully developed, even down to its instantiation in matter, but the individuated being has its own pathway back to the source, quite removed from any encounter with the other.

[42] On the Platonic background see Michel Narcy, 'En quête du moi chez Platon' in G. Aubry and F. Ildefonse, *Le moi et l'intériorité* (Paris, Vrin, 2008), p. 69, who distinguishes between the integrated soul/body of the *Timaeus*, as against the radical separation of the *Phaedo*.

[43] *Enn*. I.2(19)4, 5–6.

CHAPTER 8

Art and the seduction of beauty

We have seen that the way up to the beautiful is not through the other, but through one's own. But what of the beauty scattered across the world in images and even in living faces: does it not assist in the voyage of the lover? Does the skill of the artist have anything of the transcendental about it? We will examine Plotinus' attitude to the beauty around him, with some surprising results.

The rejection of art in the Tenth book of the *Republic* is well known, and it is always surprising for those who appreciate the thought of Plato. How can this great thinker and sorcerer of language deny that which is apparently part of himself, his own skill as an author? There seem to be two manoeuvres here. On the one hand, he rejects that *techne* which happens to give his writings their own particular magic, and all their seductive power over us, the readers; on the other, he denies that which obviously exercises an attraction for him and over him, so that we appear to be dealing with a kind of suppression or rejection of an element of his own person. The art of the poet includes Plato among its initiates, as author as well as spectator: he is at once the seducer and the seduced. Perhaps we are dealing with a deliberate irony in relation to himself.

In the memorable words of Iris Murdoch, 'Art [in Plato] gives magically induced satisfaction to the lower part of the soul, and defaces beauty by mixing it with personal sorcery'.[1] The difficulty with fine art is involved with the problem of *techne*, an idea studied by Plato over his lifetime. In the discussion of the issue in the *Ion*, apparently a document from early in his career, the question revolves around the art of the subject, rather than that of the product or the

[1] Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 45.

work of art. The art of the military commander is of a certain kind, but the art of the poet who celebrates him is probably something entirely different: or is it that a good poet is also a good general, and thus participates in the art of his chosen subject? Is it necessary to master the *techne* of his subject to represent it well? These are the questions raised in the *Ion*, and they continue to be asked throughout the work of Plato, receiving a clear reply in this dialogue at least: 'It is not through an art that poets utter these things, but by divine influence'.[2]

Art is lacking in the artist who carries out his work, not in virtue of a learnt or mastered skill, but through divine inspiration. The definite article is absent before 'art' (see footnote) in order to indicate to us that the *techne* is a single, or specific art, that it is concerned with a particular task which is both defined and discrete. There is no general artistic *techne*, capable of being applied to any subject, such as generalship, war or medicine. The specific art of the chosen subject is lacking in the artist. How then does he do his work? By inspiration, by divine power, erotic madness, or by other *dei ex machina*. But above all his creativity is not to do with technique or skill, but comes from another power, which is in some ways scarcely legitimate. We know that in the end, in Book 10 of the *Republic*, a firm answer is provided to a question which has been left open: this other capacity, which is unrelated to *techne* and perhaps beyond it, is rejected.

The suppressed question is as follows: the beauty of the poet's work is unquestioned. Where does it come from? The craft-like model, explored by Plato, is seen not to work here. Like Heidegger, who looks around him at the fields and little farms in the vicinity of his native Freiburg, Plato adopts a simple explanation: art is developed through a craftsman-like skill, by hand, by the tool and through *techne*. The examples of Plato, like those of the later Heidegger, are often drawn from ordinary life and in this case from the crafts of ordinary tradesmen. But the global *techne* of the artist is rejected: rather, the *Ion* speaks of a divine power which takes over people, one after the other, like a kind of enchantment.

[2] *Ion* 534c. The translation by Monique Canto (Flammarion, 1989), p. 102, notes the absence of the definite article and the consequence that what is meant is not art in general, but a given or specific art.

In the same manner also, the Muse in itself inspires men, and then by means of these inspired persons inspiration spreads to others and holds them in a connected chain.[3] Further on one notes that the Muse inspires in a sporadic and occasional manner: a poet can spend much of his life producing verses of little note, then at one moment and in a specific poem, and perhaps for once only in his life, he may be transformed into an inspired poet. Rhapsodic art comes then from above, in an unexpected and unpredicted way: it bears no relationship to the solid, predictable and certain *techne* of the craftsman. *Techne* is above all a specific skill.

In the *Republic* there appear to be two dominant questions, one about that specific art in comparison with the poetic art falsely claimed to be global in character, and the other about the forms/models and their relationship with the copies, and following that with the copies of copies produced by the artist. Plato also refers to the seductive power of poetry, which arouses emotions normally preferred to be mastered: this is not a question of a divine power come from above, which invades the personality, but rather of simple appeal to the emotions and lower parts of the soul.

But it should be noted that the way is open, if ever the poets can mount a convincing appeal, for poetry to return into the state:

> Do you not yourself feel her magic, especially when it is Homer in view? Greatly. Then is it not just that she should return from this exile after she has mounted her defence, whether in lyric or other metre? Yes.[4]

There are really three elements in play altogether: first, the seduction and inspiration of poetry; secondly, the forms and the transcendent reality together with the very far removed artistic representation of these; and finally the specificity of art, which brings with it the rejection of the idea of the universal perspective and insight of the artist.

Let us now turn to Plotinus to see how these themes develop. Striking by its absence is the sense of the craftsman's *techne*, the sense of daily life and of the skill of the craftsman from which Plato draws his inspiration. It is as if for Plotinus this kind of approach is incapable of separating *techne* from its object (we have mentioned the specificity

[3] *Ion* 533e (trans. Lamb (Loeb Classical Library, London/Cambridge MA, Heinemann/Harvard University Press, 1962) p. 421).
[4] *Rep*. 607d.

of the *techne* in relation to its object) since he is looking for a more abstract and more metaphysical definition of artistic activity. The skill of the artisan unfolds on the terrestrial level, whereas Plotinus makes of *techne* an ontological principle.

An important article by André Grabar[5] raises the question of the place of Plotinus in the history of the philosophy of art: he notes (p. 15) that Plotinus does not provide any discussion of contemporary art, but considers that it is scarcely possible that Plotinus, who spent his youth in Egypt, could have failed to be influenced by the painting which surrounded him. Plotinus' position, on this view, represents a kind of reaction against the practice of his day: he proposes, it is said, a philosophy of art which is much more idealised and more transcendental than these veristic paintings and artworks which surrounded him. One is aware of the photograph-like paintings of the sarcophagi and it is probable that Grabar believes that Plotinus was developing a philosophy of art deliberately in contrast to that of the post-Hellenistic tradition which surrounded him, particularly in funerary art. As is well known, the Hellenistic artistic tradition lasted for a long time in Egypt and demonstrated a great preoccupation with physical detail, with the minutiae, as well as with the grotesque and the incongruous.

One of the most important passages quoted by Grabar (who uses the translation of Bréhier) is IV.3(27)11, 1 ff., in which Plotinus describes an art which is quite different from that practised in his own time:

> I think that the wise men of old, who wished the Gods to be present to them and thus made temples and statues, looking to the nature of the All, had in mind that the nature of soul is everywhere easy to attract, but that if someone were to construct something disposed to accept its influence and able to receive a part of it, it would of all things receive soul most easily. That which is able to receive its influence is what imitates it in some way, like a mirror able to catch its form.

For André Grabar, the key to this passage lies in the term 'mirror', through which Plotinus affirms a point of view on art which is radically different from that of Plato. The image is a mirror for its

[5] 'Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale' (1945) *Cahiers Archéologiques* 1:15–36.

model and, using the Stoic doctrine of the universal sympathy in things, Plotinus establishes a real connection between the model, its essence and its representation in image form. In other words, the work of art may indeed transmit something of the being itself. But the context of this passage must be noted, since Plotinus is not talking about any work of art, but in particular about the representation of the Gods in temples. It is religious art which is the subject here, and which is specifically created to celebrate the Divine. In respect of art which might celebrate the everyday, or ordinary life, Plotinus says nothing: obviously enough, if Plotinus wants art to be the mirror of the divine, he is carefully circumscribing the art in question.

And there is indeed a step here that one does not find in Plato, who did not see or would not admit such continuity between essence and image. For Grabar, this radical departure in Plotinus, of considering art as the mirror of the divine, must have had some influence on the practice of figurative art. Such ideas or claims could not have gone unnoticed (he thinks): the pursuit of the real or essential image, steeped in reality, would have energetically engaged the artists of the day (p. 18). What preoccupies Plotinus, according to Grabar, is the pursuit of truth in art, but not truth in the sense of Hellenistic realism, but in the Platonic sense of intelligible and essential truth which transcends all things. André Grabar goes further, suggesting that this aesthetic will provide a basis for Christian art, which at that time was developing in secret studios, far from the courts of the emperors: nevertheless he has not much to say on the question of any direct influence which may have been exercised by Plotinus over these Christian establishments, preferring to say simply that such artists were already moving towards the new era of the icons in an experiential and spontaneous way. The influence of Plotinus, on Grabar's view, remains on the level of ideas, and that of the philosophy of art, which in the following years may well have contributed to a climate of positive debate towards Christian art of a transcendental and idealised style, as it was developing at that time. All this is a surprising result for the Plotinus of other-worldly reputation: could he really have been the founder of the icon movement?

Plotinus may have had direct experience of the mystical cults of his time, probably those of Isis and Osiris, and within this atmosphere

of contemplation and reflecting within a sacred place, where statues which were the subject of transcendental contemplation could be found, and he may have begun to reconsider the function of art and to question the ideas of the master, Plato. *Enn*. V.1(10)6,12 ff. reads as follows:

> The contemplator, then, since God exists by himself as if inside the temple, must remain quiet beyond all things, and must contemplate what corresponds to the images already standing outside the temple, or rather that statue which appeared first.

The statue in question is probably the *adyton* of the temple, or the most sacred sanctuary at the heart of the building. We pass over certain translation problems since they change nothing in respect of Grabar's argument, but we do note that he himself passes over the following part of this passage, in which Plotinus speaks of the movement of the statue and adds that 'everything which is moved must have some end to which it moves' (V.1(10)6, 16). This is the old Aristotelian philosophy of movement, which stipulates that movement is based on the attraction of some *telos*, a point of view which is very useful to Plotinus in this transcendental context: it appears that the statue of the *adyton* in the cult of Isis seemed to shine and to move about for the observer who had reached the peak of his contemplation. Armstrong refers to a passage of the *Asclepius*, in which the practice of the ritual animation of statues is discussed: such statues could receive the spirits of demons or of Gods and held in consequence the power to do good or evil.[6] The question of movement towards something, towards a *telos*, is of great importance since it involves the further question of the real link between the divine and the work of art. We will deal with this later under the rubric of Plotinus' discussion of enchantment.

Is Plotinus envisaging here a practical philosophy of artistic perception, such as might have appealed to an artist at work in his studio? Grabar has collected some quotations from Plotinus which seem to show a concern with perspective and with the manner of seeing, some lines from II.8(35)1, 6 ff. providing an example:

[6] Plotinus, vol. 4, 70: *Hermès Trismégiste* (Nock/Festugière), vol. II, p. 347 (Asclepius 37).

the further away the matter of the seen object, the more the form comes, so to speak, denuded (of matter) . . . Or size (l.12) is seen incidentally, with colour being primarily contemplated. So when it is near we know the extent of that which is coloured, but when it is far off only that it is coloured, but that the parts . . . do not provide accurate discernment of the extent: then, too, the colours themselves come blurred.

Other passages display an interest in light, which is a strongly developed theme in Plotinus, but here appears to be placed in the specific context of painting, at least in Grabar's view. We may entertain some doubts over certain of his comparisons, in particular between the ontological views of Plotinus and the presentation of them as the articulation of an artistic technique for displaying distance or colour, and such doubts may be particularly entertained in relation to the interpretation of the following passage, which is nevertheless part of Grabar's overall thesis:

And the depth of each thing is matter, wherefore all matter is dark: light is the *logos* (form); and Intellect is the form. Intellect sees the form in a thing and considers that what is under it is dark because it lies below the light. Similarly the eye has the form of light, directs its gaze at the light, at colours (which are lights) and affirms that what lies below the colours is dark and material, hidden beneath the [surface] colours.[7]

A first remark made by Grabar on this passage, namely, that it tends to suggest, in painting terms, 'that vision on the surface guarantees, under certain conditions, against the perception of matter' (p. 19) seems a little stretched. Nevertheless, what follows is convincing: art which appeals to the intelligence deploys light to the maximum, in an effort to diminish the sense of depth, of the obscure and dark. Light is form, and is the image of the *nous*. We should note that Plotinus is not merely referring to the colour white, as he considers that all colours are lights: Plotinus is saying that the use of colour conceals matter and exercises an appeal to intellect. And perhaps this passage, which is normally given a philosophical reading, may have been read or could have been read through the eyes of a painter. It is indeed possible to read Plotinus' analysis of perception and his ontology from an artistic perspective, with a view to putting something on canvas: if one doubts this, one has only to supply these pages of Plotinus to

[7] *Enn.* II.4(12)5, 8 ff.

a painter of one's acquaintance in order to see what will be made of it. Grabar is right to alert us to these possibilities, and to the image as the mirror of form (*logos*), which throws light in the highest sense, which truly enlightens: and we are very far here from Plato.

Nevertheless, an artistic reading of this passage is probably not at all within the intentions of the author, for whom the contemplative imagination went beyond any effort of artistic *techne*. We will deal with the question of the image in Plotinus in the next chapter, coming to conclusions more or less opposed to those of André Grabar, in that we argue that Plotinus placed a high value on only one kind of image, namely, the onto-image, that of a living being and not at all on that of the artist. It is further argued, very much against the spirit of Grabar's contribution, that the entire foundation of the iconoclastic movement could not have been laid here by Plotinus. In his view preoccupation with images constitutes a kind of blindness.[8] Given the material assembled above, I consider it difficult to think that Plotinus intentionally contributed to the development of Christian art, or of any sort of art, but it is possible that a later use, or a very eclectic reading of his writings, might have made of Plotinus a source of inspiration for another artistic vision. It therefore must be admitted that there is a possibility that, irrespective of Plotinus' own intention, these passages and others like them, including those discussed by Grabar and in particular those on light and on form, may have contributed to a certain artistic culture or style, perhaps even a Christian artistic culture. Plotinus certainly does comment on what makes art more divine in character.

It should be noted that this passage on art as mirror is one of the very few places where a favourable mention of the image may be found (the sculpture of Pheidias in V.8(31)31, 39 is another), and it should also be noted that the context is very specific: it involves a discussion of the statue in the sanctuary of the *adyton*, the most secret place in the temple. Thus, Grabar is relying on practically the only passage which speaks appreciatively of images per se, against a point of view reiterated on numerous occasions elsewhere, that the image is of an inferior nature. Further, it is possible that this passage is linked more to the magic practised in association with the statues

[8] For example, *Enn.* I.6(1)8, 9 ff.

by the later Neoplatonists, and not at all to art or representation in painting; that is, this passage may be of religious significance rather than artistic, and may therefore be even further removed from the culture of early Christian art.

It is possible, however, to entertain the hypothesis of Plotinian influence in the development of Christian art, which may have occurred through an eclectic use of his writings on the part of intermediaries who were unconcerned with the integrity of his thought and who were not concerned to appreciate the depth of Plotinus' hostility to images. Moreover, it is noted in the following chapter that the refusal of images, repeatedly undertaken throughout the writings of Plotinus, is often juxtaposed with a clear fascination for the face and the image of the face: there exists in short a kind of contradiction between the theoretical position and the sentimental position of Plotinus. He quotes with approval the passage of the *Timaeus*, in which it is said that God put 'light-bearing eyes in the faces of human beings'.[9] And we may quote again the most striking passage of all:

> If someone, seeing beauty well-represented on a face, is transported into the intelligible region, would such a person be so sluggish and immobile of mind that when he sees all the beauties of the sensible world, he will fail to say 'What things are these and whence are they?'[10]

For Plotinus, the luminosity of the face makes it unique, and capable of recalling the intelligible. It is possible to read something of celestial reality in the human face.

But this requires a living face, not that of a portrait: it is the reflection in what we may call onto-images, not in the dead images of sculptors or painters, nor in the faces of the dead themselves, which provides this glimpse into the kingdom of the intelligible. Generally, works of art belong to an inferior realm. It is the case that Plotinus' fascination with the face is linked to life itself, and with everything which has force, movement and expression in the human face. Nevertheless, it still must be acknowledged that a later reader, looking into the work of Plotinus for ideas, a Christian reader perhaps, seeking a synthesis of traditions, could well have drawn some inspiration from these passages in thinking about the portrait

[9] *Timaeus* 44e. [10] *Enn.* II.9(33)16, 49.

of Christ. This preoccupation with faces could well have something to do with the growth of the icon tradition, whether we see Plotinus as a source, in spite of himself, or whether he is seen as part of a broader culture, a mere participant in it, which itself laid the groundwork for the icon movement. Our original question must be asked again: where does the magic of the onto-image come from, and in a lower way, the magic of works of art? Is the sorcery which Iris Murdoch speaks about connected with the *techne* of the craftsman, whether celestial or terrestrial?

In Plotinus, there are two productive principles on the terrestrial level: art (*techne*) and nature (*physis*). Even though these terms are often placed in contrast, in fact they are quite close as well, and one is better off considering the two principles as complementary. In the first place, the idea that *techne* deals with the how, the way of making something, the strategy implanted in the mind of the craftsman, has to be set aside. In Plotinus *techne* becomes a being, which serially produces other beings, which are, in accordance with the Neoplatonic schema, always slightly inferior. The main passage on the taxonomy of the *technai* is found at IV.4(28)31, 3: certain *technai*, such as those that produce a house for example, find their terminus in products; others among them, medicine and architecture for example, are auxiliary, and develop nature by helping it find its form.

Art produces something, but something inferior: the toy. Modern toys sometimes consist of copies of what may be termed 'real objects': it must have been thus in antiquity, with swords of gladiators, and toy swords, for example. This is the image which Plotinus uses to describe the product of *techne*: art produces another art, which is no more than a toy. The comparison between the comparison art/toy may be found in two passages but it should be noted that the distinction between play and reality has some currency in Plotinus and is well worth further study. On the one hand:

> For art is later than soul, and imitates it and produces only dim and weak imitations, toys of little value, in spite all the devices used to produce an image of nature.[11]

And then consider III.8(30)5, 7, which compares the production of soul to that of art: as a process it resembles the way in which art

[11] *Enn.* IV.3(27)10, 17 ff.

produces. When a particular art is complete, it produces another kind of little art in a toy, which possesses a trace of all things in it. All the same, these visions, these objects of contemplation are as if obscure and helpless.

Playing is the practice of an activity which is based on another activity, which is itself more substantial and more serious. It is an activity of children, who prefer play to reality, though as they grow up they abandon toys (*paignia*), in favour of real objects, so to speak. The toy seems to be the preferred image of Plotinus for works of art since they are themselves products of the arts: what better image than something conceived, manufactured and then developed into a final product, but a final product which is ultimately banal or trivial? It should be recalled that for Plotinus, *techne* is reified, each art producing from itself another being. The toy seems to be a perfect example of an object which is all at once a copy, the product of technique, and something inferior. And so the image is a toy.

Nevertheless, there are some positive elements in Plotinus' treatment of art. This may be considered in the light of the way in which the terms *physis* and *techne* are juxtaposed, or twinned, as having virtually an equal, though different, standing:

> We certainly see that all the things that are said to exist are compounds, and not a single one of them is simple; [this applies to] each and every work of art, and all things compounded by nature. For the works of art have bronze or wood or stone, and they are not brought to completion from these until each art makes one a statue, another a bed and another a house by putting the form which it has in them. And again you will be able to resolve the things put together by nature . . . into the form imposed on all the elements of the composition.[12]

Here, Plotinus juxtaposes the two productive principles, art and nature, without distinguishing particularly between them. The relationship between art and form (*logos*) is what is important here. It may be found elsewhere, for example in the well-known passage of V.8(31)1, 9, where one is invited to compare two masses of stone, one which has not been worked on at all and carries no imprint of human culture, and the other which has been transformed by the artist and which has thus become the statue of a god or a man. And which

[12] *Enn*. V.9(5)3, 9 (trans. Armstrong).

man brings the cultural imprint to the mass of stone? It is not just anybody, but he who possesses in himself the art required to create this image. From where does the beauty of the image come?

> It is clear that the stone into which art has brought the beauty of a form, is beautiful not because it is stone, since the other would be equally beautiful, but because of the form which art has introduced into it.[13]

Form (here *eidos*) is supplied through *techne*. Art is the vehicle of beauty and is transmitted through it. And in this sense art plays a very important role in the ontological structure and process. We are told that beauty is in art, and that it is reproduced from it in a lower form. Beauty remains in art; it does not depart, but remains there, immobile. Another beauty proceeds forth, inferior to it:

> Nor does beauty pure abide in the stone, nor even such as it aspired to be, except to the extent that the stone has submitted to the art.[14]

No clearer statement could be found of the Neoplatonic structure. Raw matter is capable of receiving the imprint of form, but resists it to some extent: alternatively one could say that it is incapable of being completely mastered. In each stage, therefore, essence leaves its trace, but in a progressively diminished degree. This structure explains also why Plotinus speaks at one time in a contemptuous way of art (*techne)*, whereas at another he may take a more positive stance. These ambiguities in the language of Plotinus are explained not as contradictions within his thought, but by the perspective adopted at the time of writing: ontological continuity is such that at any moment one can take a positive or negative attitude in relation to a given being. Seen from below the being may appear higher and seen from above it may seem to display a diminishing of essence. Thus it is with *techne* and the objects of art: sometimes the perspective taken justifies negative remarks, but a change of point of view will produce positive descriptions. The change in perspective may explain the variability of Plotinus' language about art.

Pure *techne* is idealised. It should not be forgotten that *techne* is now a being, far from its Platonic origins as a craft, and in this passage we read that 'art is itself more greatly and more truly beautiful . . . and

[13] *Enn*. V.8(31)1, 12. [14] *Enn*. V.8(31)1, 21.

is more beautiful than anything in the external object'.[15] Corruption enters in to the extent that such a principle is plunged into matter, but in its pure form, *techne* is ideal.

The lover (*erotikos*) knows beauty but sometimes has only a vague recollection of it: in this case he must progressively discover the elements of true beauty, by moving from those objects which are easily appreciated to the 'beauty which is in the arts and the sciences and the virtues'.[16] In this way the lover discovers the beauty of pure art, over and above that exhibited in its instantiated form.

There is no evil in art, since evil comes from lack and privation. Art actually reinforces that which is deprived of form, but is not itself responsible for this lack of form. Lack comes from below, whereas art brings what it can of form in order to redress the weaknesses of the object on which it is deployed, in particular those of matter.[17] Elsewhere, in a telling simile, Plotinus notes that lameness does not come from the seed, rather that it arises from birth, and from the fact that the seed is impotent against matter and cannot prevail over its deficiencies: similarly there is nothing flawed or contrary to art within art itself. All that fails to accord with the nature of art comes from elsewhere, but not from art. Art itself exists in a pure state and knows no resistance to its forming nature. (In fact it should be noticed that in this passage Plotinus says the same thing about *physis*, claiming that both *techne* and *physis* exist in the intelligible regions as creative principles, both pure and flawless.)[18]

Further, as Armstrong observes, it is only with Plotinus that the human artist is said to possess the true forms, noting thus the contrast with Plato and perhaps other Neoplatonists. This remark is made in respect of another passage which states very clearly the principle of the transcendent access of the artist:

> Bronze receives [form] from the art of sculpture, and wood from the art of the carpenter: art penetrates these things through its image (*eidolon*), but remains identical to itself outside matter, and retains within itself the true statue or the true bed.[19]

This is a striking statement, since *techne* is said to reside in self-identity (*tautotes*), an Aristotelian term used by Plotinus to develop

[15] *Enn.* V.8(31)1, 24. [16] *Enn.* I.3(20)2, 10. [17] *Enn.* V.9(5)10, 17; V.9(5)11, 1.
[18] *Enn.* V.9(5)10, 4; see also II.3(52)16, 40. [19] *Enn.* V.9(5)5, 38, (trans. Armstrong, p. 301).

here his synthesis on the forms. It is the case, unexpectedly perhaps, that the principle closest to *techne* is that of nature (*physis*). *Physis* is not matter (*hyle*), but constitutes a much higher creative principle than matter, which attempts to impose form exactly in the manner of art, and which is sustained equally by intelligence and wisdom. According to V.8(31)3, 4, wisdom makes everything, whether this be the product of art or of nature; in fact the artist pursuing his model comes back to the 'wisdom of nature'. Both of these, art and nature, imitate in order to carry out their work.[20] Neither art nor nature deliberate: they do not reflect on their work, which is carried out with ease and without effort. What they make comes naturally out of their contemplation: they practise contemplation of the Intellect, and this contemplation has nothing to do with thought, analysis or reasoning. What emerges springs effortlessly from such contemplation of higher things.[21] Where reflection or reasoning takes place, art fails to function in optimal fashion, that is spontaneously and naturally; this is the sign of an imperfection not in art itself, but in the craftsman.[22]

It could almost be said that Plotinus runs together the two principles of *physis* and *techne*: both contemplate and both produce according to intelligence. They do not reflect, but they act on the basis of their contemplation. *Techne* seems to have more of design about it, but even here the characteristic of designed order is not absent from nature: further, Plotinus tends to avoid the concept of a conceived or thought-out design in art, since art in the pure sense does not reflect on its own work, but contemplates the other, above. If there is a thought-out 'how' involved, then this is not *techne* for Plotinus. It could be said that art and nature are virtually complementary, both being essential in the ontological process. But it is also true that there are fairly clear statements, noted earlier, of the subordination of art to nature.

What is enchantment? We return to our starting-point, with the question of the magic of works of art. Plotinus develops a theory of enchantment (*goeteia*) in the course of his discussion of nature in IV.4(28)43: the enchantment of the world is everywhere and it constitutes in a sense the universal character of this world. How does

[20] *Enn.* V.8(31)1, 33.
[21] *Enn.* III.8(30)4, 1–8; IV.8(6)8, 15; V.8(31)5, 4; IV.3(27)18, 7.
[22] *Enn.* IV.3(27)18, 7.

enchantment function? It is the state of being drawn by something else, of being subject to the magic of the other, a state which is both necessary and natural in this world drawn along by the forms. Enchantment exists everywhere because the world is in a state of continuous tension, directing itself towards the beautiful whilst rarely attaining it, with continuous failure only reinforcing its state of desire. The *telos* and motion towards it together do their work. Desire is in effect enchantment seen from another perspective, enchantment being rather based on the quality of the object of desire, whereas desire itself refers to a subjective state. The doctrine of enchantment is based on the Stoic idea of the universal sympathy of things, used everywhere by Plotinus but in particular here, in his discussion of nature. The sympathy of things upholds also the function of magic and its practice:

> In the arts of the magicians everything is directed towards this linking [between things in the whole]: these things occur by powers which follow on sympathetically.[23]

Enchantment animates the entire world: it exists everywhere, since everywhere there exist contemplation and the magnetism of the beautiful. Every human operation is subject to enchantment, but this enchantment is neither a technique nor the result of an artificial or conceived strategy. Enchantment is natural: it is in nature. Plotinus continues:

> For every being which is in relation with something else is enchanted by that being. That with which it is related enchants and draws it. Only that which is self-related is free from enchantment. For this reason all practical action, and the life of the practical man, are under enchantment: he is moved towards that which charms him . . . Why indeed does a man stand in relation to something else? He is drawn not by magic arts, but by nature, which brings illusion and links one thing to another not in place, but by the magic draughts which it gives.[24]

The person who is 'self-related' is not in this case a Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image: what is envisaged here is quite different, namely, contemplation via the state of being at one with oneself, in a state of ownness. Contemplation is free from enchantment, and

[23] *Enn.* IV.4(28)26, 3. [24] *Enn.* IV.4(28)43, 16 ff.

what follows tells us that every act undertaken from contemplation or arising out of contemplation is also free of the powers of such magic.

We know that Plotinus' artist looks to the forms in order to carry out his work, and that this is an exceptional situation in Platonism: he is thus, as a contemplative, beyond enchantment. But is what he produces, his work, under the spell of such enchantment? Is the work of art capable of seducing us, drawing us towards the beautiful through the attractive power which it might exercise over us? This conclusion might appear to be available, but it is not one which is drawn by Plotinus, and it seems contrary to his general philosophy of images. Nevertheless, others may have drawn it on his behalf: to create a link between the Plotinian enchantment and the seductive power of the icons must have appeared almost irresistible to later philosophical Christian readers. This is the step which was there to be taken, but which was not taken by Plotinus.

Plotinus remains the prototype iconoclast, but iconophiles may have made some use of some of his writings.

CHAPTER 9

Face, image and the self

In an earlier paper I argued that Plotinus had a particular fascination with the face.[1] This is worth stressing because it is possible to overemphasise the transcendental, other-worldly Plotinus, hater of the flesh. Possibly we have this image because the very first words of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* point us in this direction: 'Plotinus, the philosopher who lived in our time, seemed ashamed of being in the body'.[2]

Porphyry continues by saying that he refused to have a painting or sculpture made of himself, indicating in Platonist vein that making an image of what was already an image, was pointless. Amelius, a philosopher in his circle, brought in a famous painter (the meetings were not closed) and he did a sketch from memory, which Amelius helped improve. Porphyry also seems to indicate a certain prudishness, as when a philosopher presented a paper on the necessity of having sexual intercourse with one's teacher in order to progress in virtue, a subject which was robustly debated in Plato's own circle according to the *Symposium*: Plotinus repeatedly got up to leave.[3] He was well pleased with the refutation. He was seen, according to Porphyry, as trustworthy, morally upright and an example to others. Thus, Porphyry presents him as austere, other-worldly, abstemious, morally pure, and also as hostile to art. This image of Plotinus is profoundly influential and we have carried it into the interpretation of his philosophy, allowing the biography to dominate our understanding of the philosophy.

[1] Raoul Mortley, 'The Face and the Image in Plotinus' (1998) *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 6: 3–21. This chapter should be read in conjunction with that paper.
[2] *Life* 1. [3] *Life* 15.

But we are arguing here for a more this-worldly Plotinus: that is, the philosopher Plotinus, not the person. Elsewhere, in Chapter 4 ('Plotinus' Eros'), we have claimed that the starting point in understanding his thought, as opposed to his life, is probably his philosophy of beauty, outlined in I.6, and it is here and in the treatise *Against the Gnostics* that we see the clearest glimpses of the this-worldly Plotinus, at home with what he sees around him. There is no doubt that he is inward- and upward-looking, of course, but we should not overlook the extent to which he regards the creation of the world, even the human body, as a positive. It is the holistic character of his philosophy which allows him to be positive about the world, because all of reality is interconnected, and none of it is a 'strange land', as the Gnostics saw it, in Plotinus' characterisation.[4] For this reason we must be careful about writing off the embodied self in Plotinus: it is also part of the interconnected whole.

Overall, there is something special about the face for Plotinus. We note that Porphyry had the same sensitivity, in that he says that the manifestation of intelligence lit up Plotinus' own face when he spoke.[5] There may be, as we argued in the earlier paper, a foreshadowing of the iconoclastic debates in that Plotinus' language seems to betray both a fascination with the face, and a warning against this. It is clear, though, that Plotinus sees some special luminosity in the living, human, face, and in the eyes; his language is quite striking. What of contemporary art and portraiture, the image of the human face? We should think about the world he actually lived in, what natural beauty he may have responded to, and what the world of art, in the form of painting and sculpture, held for him and his circle. The upper class circles of third century Rome, in which he moved, certainly had an artistic culture, and would no doubt have followed the artistic celebrities of the day. He had a famous artist attending his seminars, as we saw. He lived in a world in which art was ever-present in the form of images of all sorts – that much is clear from his writing; he may have felt the early siren call of 'icons' (images), to which the pro-icon party in later Christianity succumbed, though not of course of Christian images. There is plenty to suggest the divine and

[4] *Enn.* II.9(35)11, 12.
[5] *Life* 13. His intellect in general enhanced his appearance (thus Porphyry).

the upward-looking in the art of Alexandria and Rome of the time, without Christianity having to be involved. The syncretism exhibited by Christian art puts all, pagan and Christian, in a common world of artistic culture. Plotinus lived in the time of the emperor Gallienus, and some have postulated a Gallienic renaissance in portraiture.[6] Plotinus was close to Gallienus, as Porphyry tells us, and was venerated by him.[7] There has even been speculation that Plotinus influenced contemporary artistic practice through his teaching, but speculation it remains.

Let us consider this context. We have noted Plotinus' emphasis on the importance of colour in sculpture, his belief that colour was a form of light, and that this served to divert attention away from the mass of matter underlying the colours. It is often forgotten that sculptures in antiquity were painted, and their beauty was thought to lie in their form and colour, not in the pristine white marble which we in later times inherited, washed of its colour by the passage of time. In general, since the Hellenistic period and the influence of Hellenistic art in Egypt, Italy and other places, the eyes were strongly portrayed and would have been so in the art surrounding Plotinus, particularly that photograph-like art of the portraits of the dead on the sarcophagi. Eyes were given more prominence, sometimes with the pupil elevated off-centre to create a more upward-looking effect; the eyes may even be slightly enlarged to emphasise them, as a sign of spirituality, and much use was made of the white highlight ('rehaut') to make them seem more striking, more luminous. Most clearly evident in the paintings of the Fayum available in the different collections, this trend causes many commentators to remark on the gaze of the subject, which lifts the eyes of the portrait to a dramatic intensity.[8] One thinks of the 'light-bearing eyes' which God placed in the human face according to both Plato and Plotinus (see below).

This may well provide a cultural context for Plotinus, a philosopher observing contemporary art (always a difficult situation). Observations of the art around him may well have found the response of wonderment as below: seized by reverence he asks the question,

[6] See the discussion in Lukas de Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden, Brill, 1976), p. 196 ff.

[7] *Life* 12. [8] See also de Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, p. 196 ff.

'what things are these, and whence?'[9] This is the positive cry of wonderment expressed, most significantly, against the backdrop of the negativity of the Gnostics about the created world. He does believe that the higher parts of the body (the face and head) are the superior parts of the body, and this reflects the portraiture of the time, which concentrated on faces, not whole bodies: 'The upper parts of every living thing, faces and heads, are more beautiful, and the middle and lower parts are not equal to them'.[10]

In the course of this discussion, Plotinus notes that the same face can sometimes appear beautiful, and sometimes not (*Enn.* I.6(1)1, 38); there is apparently, as Porphyry observed about Plotinus' own face, a moment of luminosity, probably when it is lit up by intellect.

Plotinus does see beauty in the universe, despite his correction of the demiurge who, according to Plato, admired it: he sees a star-decked universe with lights shining at its apex, and he does see man as having a similar 'shining', perhaps with a starlit face like a work of Hephaestus: the light in the face of man is seen as parallel to that which illuminates the universe. Hephaestus, the master metal worker, must have created an image of stars on a god's face, or Plotinus is imagining that he could have done, as he was responsible for most of the accoutrements of the gods in Greek myth.[11]

Plotinus is sensitive to the beauty of art when someone recognises in a picture the image of someone who is present in thought; that person cannot fail to be moved and 'come to a recollection of the truth'.[12] This is art as a vehicle for the transcendent, and it will be recalled that Plato in Book X of the *Republic* could not seem to find this justification for art, presenting it as mere imitation. An imitation can prompt recollection; this is close to a contradiction of Plato's position. In particular, one notes again the passage:

> But if someone who sees beauty well represented in a face is carried to the higher world, will anyone be so sluggish and so immoveable that, having seen all the beauties in the world of sense . . . he will not then think, seized with reverence: 'what are these things, and whence?'[13]

[9] *Enn.* II.9(33)16, 55.
[10] *Enn.* III.2(47)8, 3.
[11] *Enn.* III.2(47)14, 28.
[12] *Enn.* II.9(33)16, 48.
[13] *Enn.* II.9(33)16, 55. Plotinus appears to be referring to artistic representations of the face here (I.45).

Here, Plotinus slips to the beauty of an actual living face, and he does seem to run the two together throughout this passage. But that is not altogether surprising since he sees both as images of what is above. It should also be said that this is to some extent the language of Plato himself, who in the *Phaedrus* shows more sympathy for representation in art, and who actually also speaks of a face possessing 'well-represented beauty', and its capacity to arouse awe and reverence.[14] Plotinus does express the wonderment which can be aroused by a face, and how it can point one to a source.

The key to Plotinus' view of the All is illumination. If one reads the treatise *Against the Gnostics* (II.9) together with the treatise *On Beauty* (I.6), one sees clearly the splendour of the universe as in his mind's eye. The debate with the Gnostics is extraordinary, and the treatise is marked by genuine anger, as well as irony and sarcasm. This fact alone marks it out as exceptional among all of his works, characterised as they are for the most part by dispassionate, intricate arguing. Since the Gnostics have tended to disappear from the historical record it now appears strange that he should have devoted so much effort and emotion to refuting their ideas, but we surmise that this is a case of the special anger reserved for the renegades of the group, those who are so close that their distortions and blasphemies cannot be ignored. What of the Christians? They are so different that they are not really a threat; in any case there is enough of the orthodox Platonic piety in their works, such as those of Clement and Origen, that they are seen to do the decent thing, unlike the renegade brothers. And there is no pretension about the loftiness of the human self, as we shall see below.

Illumination is the key to Plotinus' positive view of being: he sees the engendered world as a kind of temple flooded with light. This contrasts with the Gnostic view of the world as a kind of prison, shrouded in darkness. It is the difference between darkness and light which most sharply divides the two camps, and which displays Plotinus at his most positive about the here below. What could be better than this, is the question asked by Plotinus:

> What other, fairer, image of that world could there be? For what other fire could be better than the fire there, than the fire here? Or what other earth

[14] *Phaedrus* 251a.

better than this, after the intelligible earth. And what sphere could be more exact or more august, or better ordered in its circuit, after the circumference within itself there, of the intelligible world?[15]

Soul is the key to this light-giving activity: it is always illuminated itself, and holds the light, endowing with light that which comes after it. The principle of its giving to what comes after it is important at all levels of reality, as Plotinus sees it, because this helps to annul the idea that there is decline, or a falling away into decay. Giving of what is its own characterises the Good and the Intellect: if they do give, how can they not be the Good and the Intellect, respectively?[16] This principle then leads to the inter-dependence of the various levels of reality, and the principle of continuous giving tends to reinforce the positive characterisation of the world in Plotinus' thought. It is in the nature of the Good to give, otherwise it loses its character, and it must therefore have something to which to give. This explains the role of the lower realms, as recipients of that natural giving, and as necessarily there, since giving must have a recipient. This neat dovetailing of roles allows Plotinus to avoid the idea of a calamitous decline into darkness and strangeness; not only does the lower need the higher in order to be illuminated and beautified, but the higher needs the lower in order to play out that role, which is in its nature – manifestly so, says Plotinus, when one looks at the beauty of the created world. Thus, there is no decline: Plotinus apophatically removes the notion of decline from the word 'decline' by negating it, and in accordance with this logic we infer that the notion sought starts with the idea of decline, but removes most of its ordinary associations from it:

But we say that the making of the soul is not a decline, but rather a non-decline. If it had declined, it was obviously because it had forgotten the things thither; but if it had forgotten them, how is it the craftsman of this world?[17]

Proceeding via a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, Plotinus argues that the making and giving activity proceeds through the remembrance of the intelligible realities, and that if this is called 'decline' it cannot be a standard form of decline. It brings the above to the below, and really represents a form of inclining upwards. What other reason could

[15] *Enn.* II.9(33)4, 26 ff. [16] *Enn.* II.9(33)3, 1–15 passim. [17] *Enn.* II.9(33)4, 7.

there have been for making the world, he asks rhetorically: surely not the motive of the sculptor, who also makes a copy of something, but does so for the sake of receiving accolades. This making activity is derived from the urge to give, and to endow the world below with the characteristics of the world above. If the craftsman had made a mistake in creating the world, then why is he not destroying it? Somewhat sarcastically, Plotinus answers his own question, by saying that the maker must have got used to the created world over time; he concedes the existence of evil, as arising from the fact that the created world is a copy of the intelligible, and is not identical with it.

The verdict is an emphatically positive statement about the created world as quoted above, asserting that whilst the world is an image of the intelligible there could be no better image: no better fire, no better sphere, no better sun. One does not cling to the beauties here, but nor does one insult them; one sees in them what they have to offer, namely, glimpses of the higher world.[18] Where does the self fit into this? Plotinus has a specific difficulty with the way in which the Gnostics position the soul, and this is instructive: despite the way in which they write of the physical world as a place of darkness, a strange land, and so on, they do give a special place to the soul, or possibly to their own souls, as of the enlightened ones. They claim that the soul is immortal and divine, and that it has a particular grasp of the immortal and the divine. Plotinus objects to the primacy thus attributed to the individual soul, which ranks it above the stars and the sun.[19] He seems to rank the sun above the individual soul, as being freer from affections and as enjoying a more ordered and stable existence; we must not forget the rigid ranking of beings in Plotinus' system, in that there is a hierarchy which cannot be taken out of order.[20]

This gives us a clue to the positioning of the self, or the 'we'. Plotinus will not exalt it in the same way as the Gnostic individual soul (though we have seen some language which does drift in that direction, as when he speaks of the self as 'reigning'). He explicitly rejects the very high view taken by the Gnostics of the soul, of their soul, as 'immortal and divine'.[21] We are not a part of the intelligible (here, Plotinus is speaking about the soul, but includes the

[18] *Enn.* II.9(33)17, 35–40. [19] *Enn.* II.9(33)5, 8 ff.
[20] *Enn.* II.9(33)5, 4. [21] *Enn.* II.9(33)5, 9.

'we' as part of the discussion) and the soul orders things, not by managing the body through discursive thinking, but effortlessly, through contemplation.[22] The self will occupy an intermediate position, close to body and intimately linked with it. The sun and the stars are higher. Plotinus makes it clear that the 'we' includes the 'beast', or the affective, physical side of the human being: 'So "we" is used in two ways, either included with the beast, or that which even now transcends it'.[23]

Two things are clear from this: that the self occupies an intermediate position, unlike the Gnostic soul, and that it is fully embodied. The way in which it is capable of being both with the beast and with the transcendent is explained by this specifically Plotinian notion of having, or possession. We possess the Intellect as we possess something that transcends us; in answer to the question of how we are related to the intellect, Plotinus says simply that we possess it.[24] He inquires at length into the relationship of possession and says that it comes about because the Intellect gives of itself to the whole universe: what is given is possessed. It is again a process compared to illumination, as something giving off images of itself, like a face seen in many mirrors at once.

This is in the end how the self can be fully embodied, yet still preserve its link with the transcendent: despite all the difficulties of the flesh, it still has what it has been given. This again underlines the positive view of the world held by Plotinus, in that everywhere he sees mirror images of the Intellect, not least because of its giving of itself, which in turn leads to having.

'We', or the self, are 'third from God', being made from both the divided and the undivided.[25] Against the lofty Gnostic view of the superiority of the we, Plotinus advocates an intermediate position. His main philosophic problem is that of explaining how this combination can occur, and he uses different models to attempt to

[22] *Enn*. II.9(33)2, 12–16.

[23] *Enn*. I.1(53)10, 6. Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Plotin, Traité 53* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2004), p. 99, notes that Plotinus here speaks of the 'beast', whereas a few lines earlier it was the *zoon*, 'living creature'. See also p. 221 ff.

[24] *Enn*. I.1(53)8, 1–15. See Aubry, *Plotin. Traité 53*, p. 240: 'this *ekhein* which denotes . . . an essential identity'.

[25] *Enn*. I.1(53)8, 9–15.

solve the issue; that is, he accepts the full philosophical dilemma that his position on the intermediate character of the self imposes, that of how the permanently stable and immutable can harmoniously co-exist with the ever-moving base of the physical. Much of I.1(53)2–7 is taken up with the discussion of just how this compound (*sunamphoteron*) can hang together, and operate, with its various capacities and tendencies.[26] Alternatively, the term 'mixture' is used.[27] These issues pose a considerable difficulty for Plotinus, but consistency demands that he establish a way for the fully embodied self to work. He does consider the possibility that there is a form of the soul, and Pauliina Remes discusses this together with the question of forms of individuals. She notes that Plotinus says that souls are something *like* forms, but that it is unclear what he meant by this.[28] It is almost inevitable that Plotinus should visit this issue, since the body must have a forming or enlightening principle to give it the image of what is above, and given that the soul plays this ordering role, it certainly appears to do the work that the forms do elsewhere. The main concern, as Remes indicates, is to preserve the notion that the soul remains unaffected by the body, though it affects the soul. The soul remains 'impassive' and resistant to bodily affections. The forms behave like this, in that they influence but are not themselves influenced: the forms remain static, though they move matter by their presence. The principle of growth does not itself grow when it causes growth.[29] This approach to the soul allows it to occupy an intermediate position, plunged in the body but impervious to the body's impulses.

As to whether there are forms of individuals, the answer appears to be clearly given: not in the way that an artwork representing Socrates derives from the original Socrates. The forms operate on matter producing different individuals. It appears that several forms converge in the production of an individual, and so there is no one archetype to dictate the shape of an individual. The vast number of

[26] *Enn*. I.1(53)6, 6, 15, for example. We use the translation 'compound', which suggests more of the idea of 'fusion' than does the French 'couple' (see Aubry, *Plotin Traité 53*, pp. 202–3).
[27] *Enn*. I.1(53)4, 1 ff.
[28] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 77.
[29] *Enn*. III.6(26)4, 35 ff.

individual differences makes this impossible, thus Plotinus.[30] It may be speculated that difference arises from the resistance of different types of matter, which though it is in the end subjugated by form, nevertheless remains differentiated. It should be noted, though, that Pauliina Remes does not see this text as necessarily saying anything about forms of individuals.[31]

The 'common entity' (*to koinon*)[32] is this composite of forming soul and body, and there is talk here of a higher soul and a lower. Plotinus does ask the question of whether the 'we' and the soul are the same, and the issue appears to be that if we commit to that view then the consequence would be the claim that the soul is affected in the same way as 'we' are.

This appears to be difficult: 'Yes, but we said that the common entity is part of us, especially when we are not yet separated from the body'.[33]

It is at this point that Plotinus introduces the notion of the higher and lower self, that facility which includes 'the beast', but is also capable of looking higher. 'We do not always use what we have', says Plotinus.[34] So the 'we', or the self, is clearly in the intermediate position being with the above and the below simultaneously. There is never any complete decline since the recuperative power of the form is always present.[35] There is always some light. The treatise *On Beauty* (I.6) reminds us of the ugliness mixed with beauty in the soul, and considers it to be like an outer covering of filth. The way to restore the beauty within is to wash off this outer covering:

> if anyone takes away the earthiness, the gold is left, and is beautiful, isolated from other things, alone with itself.[36]

The true part of the self remains unadulterated, in that it suffers no mixture or compounding. 'That part which gives life to the body takes no addition from it.'[37]

This underlying positive, good in the embodied self, allows Plotinus his special sense of captivation with the human face. There is nothing to be written off about the embodied self, and it even has

[30] *Enn.* V.7(18)1, 22 ff. [31] *Ibid.* [32] *Enn.* I.1(53)10, 3 ff.
[33] *Enn.* I.1(53)10, 3 ff. [34] *Enn.* I.1(53)11, 6. [35] *Enn.* I.1(53)12, 24 ff.
[36] *Enn.* I.6(1)5, 52–3. [37] *Enn.* II.9(33)7, 18–19.

a presentation which, through the face, advertises its origins and its potential loftiness. Plotinus seems to be clearly saying that an inert face (that of a dead person, or possibly a portrait) lacks that 'grace' which catches the eye, giving an awakening effect. The whole activity of the lover, as described in *On Beauty*, is premised on this kind of beauty in the physical world:

> It is as if the soul were in the presence of a beautiful face (*prosopon*), but one which cannot catch the eye because it has no conspicuous grace (*charis*) diffused over its beauty . . . Why is the light of beauty found more upon a living face, with only a trace of it on a dead one, even if its flesh and proportions are not yet wasted away? . . . And is not an uglier living man more beautiful than a beautiful man in a statue? Yes, because the living is more desirable . . . it is somehow coloured by the light of the good, and being so coloured wakes, rises up, and lifts up that which it holds, making it good to the extent that it can, and waking it.[38]

Plotinus sees Intellect as a combination of faces, a kind of unity in multiplicity, each face having its own unity.[39] Intellect is imagined as a 'being which is all faces, shining with living faces'.[40] This suggests a kind of confluence of faces meeting at the single point of the unitary inner face, or being. It is noteworthy that Plotinus should choose to represent Intellect as a face by way of metaphor: he presents the image of an 'omnifacial' sphere, whose surfaces radiate light from many living faces. The soul stands before the intellect, as if in the presence of a face. One can almost imagine from the following words standing in front of a giant statue of the Buddha, attempting to discern something in the enigmatic face:

> As if [the soul] were in the presence of a beautiful face, beautiful indeed but not yet able to catch the gaze since it has no grace enhancing its beauty.[41]

This is Intellect compared to a face again, but without the illumination of the grace which lightens it. The soul is in the presence of this face, but waiting for it to be illuminated: Plotinus continues by saying that there is so much more beauty in a living face than a dead one, even if the latter is perfectly proportioned and shows all the characteristics of beauty. Beauty illuminates good proportion: it is not itself

[38] *Enn.* VI.7(38)22, 23.
[39] *Enn.* VI.7(38)15, 26.
[40] *Enn.* VI.7(38)15, 26.
[41] *Enn.* VI.7(38)22, 22–5.

good proportion. And the more lifelike statues are the more beautiful images, because the living is coloured by the light of the Good.

Thus, there is some beauty in the living human face, and even some trace of it in a life-like image. The illuminated face is the model par excellence for Plotinus' picture of the intelligible and transcendent and this kind of image reproduces itself throughout the descent into physical reality. This other, lower, universe *must* exist, 'for it is utterly unlawful that there should be no beautiful image of beauty and being'.[42] The image imitates its archetype in every way, and has that life and being which is appropriate to its status as a copy. 'This visible universe is then plausibly called an image which is always being imaged.'[43] Clearly, in addition to being a necessary process, self-reproduction in image form is also a continuous process. Change itself is nothing more than this constant imaging. The human face is a reproduction of the beauty of Intellect. Again, let us remind ourselves of Plotinus' attack on the Gnostics and their dismissal of the physical world:

> But what other fairer image of the intelligible world could there be? For what other fire could be a more powerful image of the intelligible fire than the fire here?[44]

When God was bringing souls to birth he put 'light-bearing eyes' in their faces and gave them all the organs they needed to live in the world.[45] For Plotinus, the human face is a designed necessity, and its unity within multiplicity resembles precisely that of Intellect, which contains so much within itself.[46] A multiplicity of faces is the perfect image for the manifold identity of Intellect.[47]

In short, for Plotinus the majesty of the All is best captured through the image of the face: the perfection of the living human face lies in the fact that at the apex of the body, carrying the light-bearing eyes, and illuminating all in its own imaged way, it perfectly replicates the magnificence of the transcendent. It sits splendidly atop 'the beast'.

This makes the human face the perfect badge for the embodied self.

[42] *Enn.* V.8(31)12, 13. [43] *Enn.* II.3(52)18, 16. [44] *Enn.* II.9(33)4, 6.
[45] *Enn.* VI.7(38)1, 1–3. [46] *Enn.* VI.7(38)15, 8 ff. [47] *Enn.* VI.7(38)15, 26–30.

Conclusion

We have asked the speculative question of why Plotinus failed to write a history of himself, whereas Augustine, the Christian writer, did do so in the form of his own autobiography, the *Confessions*. Augustine was a reader of Plotinus; both had a robust view of the individual self, and both had a respect for the physical world, and a view of the self as part of it (as we have argued). We set aside Porphyry's remarks about Plotinus seeming to be ashamed of living in the flesh as being psychological commentary, and we have looked at Plotinus' actual philosophy. Plotinus the philosopher rescues the physical world from the onslaught of the Gnostics.

For Plotinus, the memory also plays a positive role, just as with Augustine, who exclaims over its majestic powers. But in the end for Plotinus the memory is appropriate only to certain phases of being and certain levels of reality, and its value comes from the sphere in which it operates. It is only activated when the soul moves away from perfection. The transcending of the self is the ultimate goal and at that point neither memory, nor thought, nor even self-knowledge, is relevant any more, and so forgetting becomes the goal. 'The good soul is forgetful.'[1] For the Christian writer, the reification of human progress and the historicisation of the church meant that this route was impossible, despite the closeness of his view to that of Plotinus. The spiritual discipline lay in remembering.

Plotinus the philosopher walks a tightrope on the physical world: he saves it from being written off by the Gnostics, as above, but he also finds a way to save Plato's demiurge from admiring the physical world. In a very significant correction of Plato, Plotinus' interpretation has

[1] *Enn.* IV.3(27)32, 17.

the demiurge admiring the form, not the created world itself. The demiurge, in Plotinus' account, does not express delight over the world, but looks above it to the form. Why then do lovers love, and become attached to the physical world? It is out of ignorance about what they love, and they mistake the object of their affection. Love may be misdirected, and may pine after the wrong object, but the demiurge, in Plotinus' rewriting of Plato, does not make this mistake, in that he admires the forms, not the instantiated forms.

Love for Plotinus is a matter of seeing that which is akin, or one's own. Love is strangely tranquil, exhibiting none of the tension or angst that we see in the *eros* of Plato: a contemplation in self-sufficiency of that which is above, with sight given from above. Love is not associated with the desire to procreate, as in Plato, and the idea of love being born of lack, or of some emptiness, is reinterpreted: the desire to procreate is associated with lack, and is born of matter. Love appears to be altogether a loftier thing, living in a world in which contemplation of the familiar appears wholly natural.

The concept of 'having', and of what is 'ours', is central to Plotinus' discussion of the self: we have things in different ways, sometimes by the nature of what we are, shaped towards Intellect, and sometimes by what we possess, in quite ordinary terms. The idea of having is simply one of the most fundamental concepts in the way Plotinus constructs the world of the self. We have a royalty about us, in that we are capable of the highest things. 'Having' is the state which gives the self strength and groundedness, makes it proof against being swept away by enchantment, or waves of emotion. Having is linked to being itself, in the sense that we have what is proper to ourselves: 'ownness' (*to oikeion*) is our authenticity. The copula is linked to the predicate: what we have is what we are. There is a proper 'ownness', which applies to every being except the ultimate, since the Good neither needs nor possesses; but for us the Good is our own and we must pursue it rather than things which are alien or other – things which are not our own.

Self-knowledge does not have much of a place in this view. Looking at one's image (the tradition of the *First Alcibiades*) is not taken seriously as an option, and Plotinus looks to the notion of the *oikeion*, in this context, that which is 'akin'. Intellect forms itself fully in matter, as it is under an obligation to keep on giving: it must move

towards all things. Love is not about the other, and nor is self-knowledge about the self, but about the pursuit of that which is one's own. That ownness lies above one, not laterally across from one, in any sense.

Despite this, Plotinus is sensitive to the world of art, even conceding that art might mirror the divine. The highest forms of art make use of light: light is the metaphor for the Intellect and its work, and the glimpses of light in paintings do have an appeal for Plotinus. But in the end he prefers the living image. Art (*techne*) is closer to nature than we might expect, as both *physis* and *techne* exist in the intelligible as forming principles, and the latter is very far removed from the craft of Plato's discussions. But in the end the art of the artist here below is but a faded copy of the art above, and produces only toys.

The face has a particular appeal for Plotinus – the living face – and it exhibits the kind of luminosity which reveals its source: that grace which is from above, and which plays upon it. In the end the human body is the vehicle of the self, of the 'we', and despite Plotinus' personal discomfort with it, the body and the physical world is fully embraced in his philosophy. In the end, faced with the beauties of the sensible world, including the luminosity of the human face, who will not cry 'what are these things, and whence?' (p. 113). He sees the world as flooded with light, not as a Gnostic prison, shrouded in darkness.

Thus, it is appropriate that the self should reside within this physical universe, fully plunged in it, and not suspended above it in some sort of privileged position as the Gnostics would have it. We 'have' the Intellect after all even in this lower state, but he is insistent that there could be no finer image of the intelligible world than this image which we inhabit. Porphyry has put us off the scent somewhat, with his biographical remarks about Plotinus appearing ashamed to be in the body. His philosophy itself is a paean of praise for the majesty of the created, physical world and everything that is imaged therein.

The face is the perfect emblem for the embodied self, as it reflects the luminosity of a thousand faces above, Intellect itself being characterised by a multiplicity of faces, all receiving and diffusing light through their 'light-bearing eyes', the eyes being the symbol of the

divine so vividly captured in the art of his time. Matter for Plotinus is formed by the gift of Intellect, which progresses through it and incorporates it in its creative activity, and the self lives within this. It is not that matter is redeemed or saved by Intellect: its authenticity comes from Intellect itself and is always a structural part of its reality.

In the end being one's own is the key to life in the world, and this is very close to a concept of authenticity: authentic being is one's own appropriate possession, one's *oikeion*: 'Anything exists more . . . when it belongs to itself'.[2]

[2] *Enn*. VI.6(34)1, 12.

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